RELAUNCH ISSUE!

148 PAGES OF THE BEST COMICS FEATURES, INTERVIEWS & REVIEWS

# COMIC HEROES

SERIOUS ABOUT COMICS

EXCLUSIVE

## STAR WARS

DARTH VADER WRITER KIERON GILLEN SPEAKS + NEW ISSUES REVIEWED

## GRANT MORRISON

THE MULTIVERSITY CREATOR ON REINVENTING SANTA CLAUS

+

- THE 25 COOLEST COMICS CHARACTERS
- THE THRILLING NEW VERTIGO SLATE
- HOW TO START YOUR OWN INDIE COMIC
- BOND. JAMES BOND...

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SERIOUS ABOUT COMICS

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# EXCELSIOR!

# WELCOME!

And a big hello to readers new and old. We're back, with our first new issue since July 2014. Frankly, it's a pleasure to be here.

This magazine started life as a special issue of *SFX* magazine way back in 2010. It proved so popular that it immediately became a regular title in its own right. We ran for four years until, like Captain America, we were temporarily put on ice. But just like Cap it was merely a hiatus...

We may have a new look but we're very much the same magazine at heart. We love comics and we want to celebrate them in all their glory. In this issue alone we've got features on everything from All-New, All-Different Marvel to the Vertigo relaunch, James Bond and Grant Morrison's gritty reinvention of Santa. Yes, that really is a thing.

We've also got a wonderful columnist in the form of Leah Moore, a revived review section and the start of an ongoing guide to creating indie comics. And don't worry if one of your favourites is missing – we'll be bringing things like our popular Art Of profiles back in future issues.

This is just the start of our plans for *Comic Heroes* and we hope you'll stick with us. Our next issue is on sale **8 January**. Until next time then, see you in the funny pages...

Will

**Will Salmon, Editor**

EDITOR'S PHOTO © 2015 KEVIN LOWE

CHECK ME OUT ON PAGE 72

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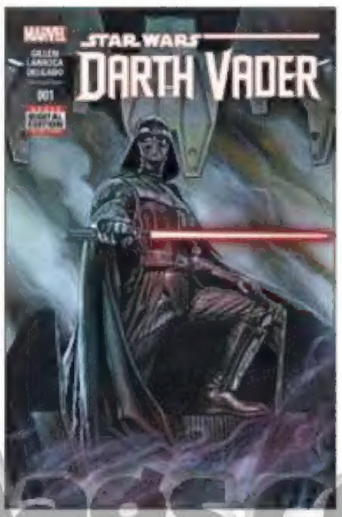
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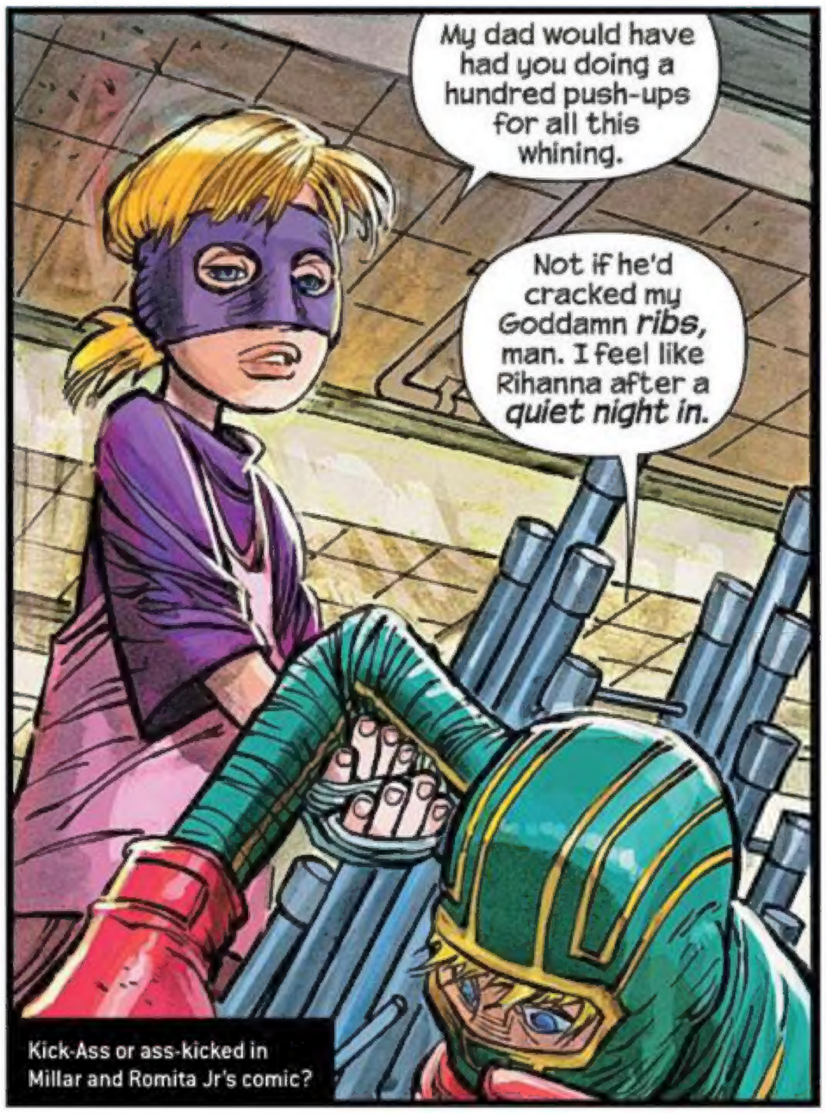
# HEATVISION

## THE HOTTEST NEWS FROM THE COMICS WORLD


My dad would have had you doing a hundred push-ups for all this whining.
Not if he'd cracked my Goddamn *ribs*, man. I feel like Rihanna after a *quiet night in.*

Kick-Ass or ass-kicked in Millar and Romita Jr's comic?

# COMIC IDOL!

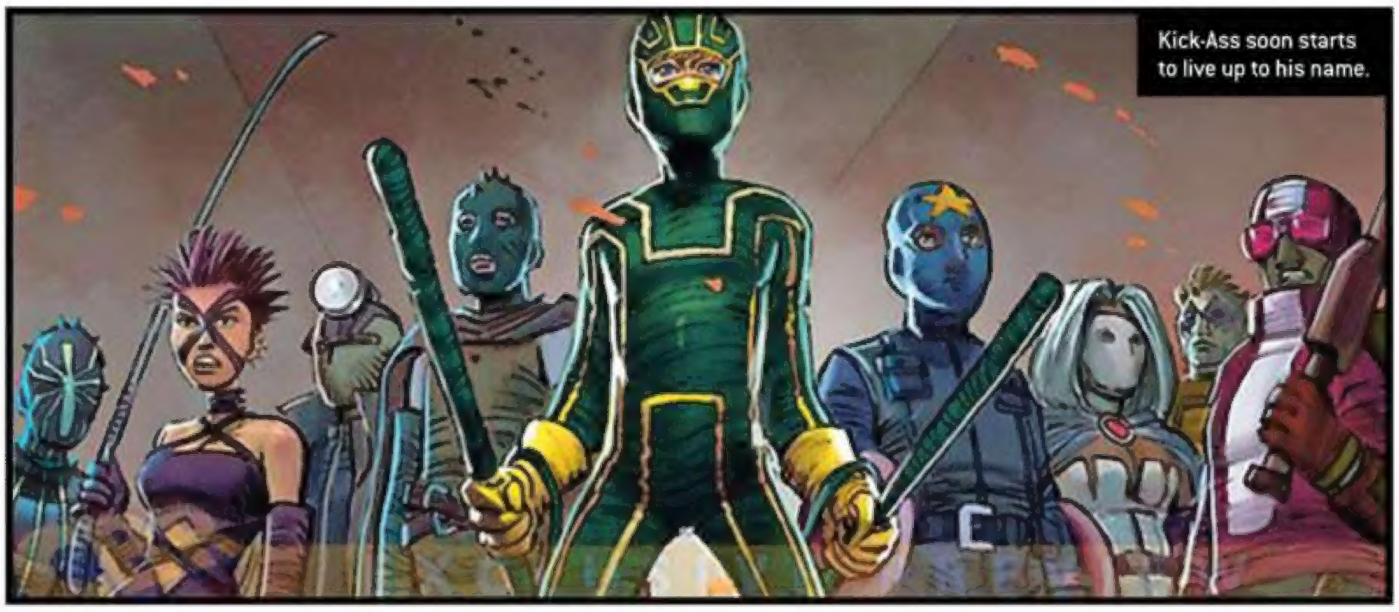
**Mark Millar** is launching a new talent contest to find the comic creators of the future

**Kick-Ass creator Mark Millar is set to launch a global talent search to find a new generation of comics writers and artists.** The winners will be granted the opportunity to write or draw a strip in a Millarworld anthology.

From 28 September, creators will be able to upload an example of their work to the Millarworld website. Six writers and six artists will be picked out, partnered up and given the chance to create a story using some of the Millarworld cast of characters. "There seems to be a disconnect between genuinely talented students at schools, colleges and universities getting into the comic-book industry," says Millar. "I want to provide a platform to enable these people to showcase their talents."

Millar himself will be sitting down to judge the entries as they come in. The finished stories will be published in a not-for-profit comic that will be available in stores worldwide. "I think you've got a bit of a responsibility, y'know?" Millar said in an exclusive interview with *Comic Heroes*. "I've been really lucky with my career, so it just seemed like a nice thing to do."

***www.millarworld.tv***



Kick-Ass soon starts to live up to his name.

## MILLAR ON TOUR

Mark Millar is currently on tour, visiting comic shops around the UK and finishing up at Gosh! in London. The dates are below.

**9 Oct / 5.30pm**
Travelling Man, York

**10 Oct / 2pm**
Forbidden Planet, Newcastle

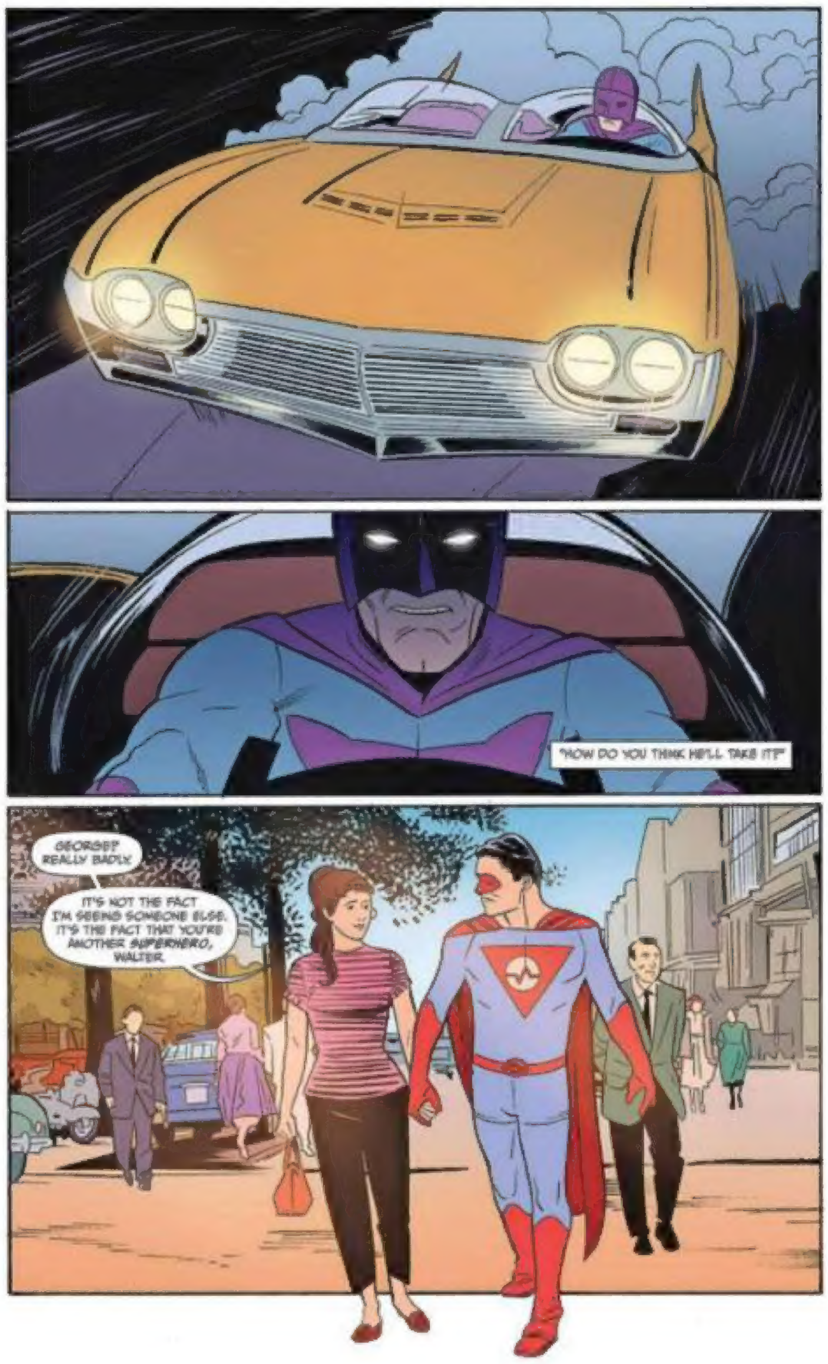
**17 Oct / 12.30pm**
Waterstones West End, Edinburgh

**17 Oct / 6pm**
Waterstones Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow / Q&A with a signing

**31 Oct / 1pm**
Gosh!, London

# MARK MILLAR

## The **Kingsman** creator on his new talent search


"HOW DO YOU THINK HE'LL TAKE IT?"
GEORGE? REALLY BADLY.
IT'S NOT THE FACT I'M SEEING SOMEONE ELSE. IT'S THE FACT THAT YOU'RE ANOTHER SUPERHERO, WALTER.

ALL IMAGES © 2015 MARK MILLAR

**What spurred you to start this new talent search?**
It just seemed like a nice thing to do. There used to be loads of easy places to start. But, especially in the States now, it's hard for people to start out without investing their own money. If you're self publishing then you take a financial risk and you have to work for free. If you're trying to get noticed by a publisher you kind of have to do a four-issue series or maybe put something online. Even then you have to compete with so many other things. Marvel, DC and Image are bringing out a record number of books. So my idea was to find people with good samples, just commission them and make sure that they actually get paid for their work.

**Are you going to be judging the competition yourself?**
I start at 6am most days and work till 7pm at night, but yes, I am actually going to be judging it with some pals. I'll be really involved. I love that though. There's nothing more exciting than looking on Deviant Art, or something, and seeing an artist you've never seen before. You still come across some really brilliant folk who just haven't found an outlet yet. Some people have been working away for years and haven't been noticed. So I wanted to say, "if you've never been in print before, here's an opportunity to send me some samples." I'm gonna take four weeks and just wade through everything with a team of about eight pals.

**And you will be matching the writers and artists together?**
That's the plan. I love the idea of putting talented people together. That's when good stuff happens.

**Is there an age limit?**
No, it's open to literally anybody! The only qualification is that they have to be good. You just want somebody who's talented. Steve Dillon was drawing for British Marvel when he was 16 and Jim Shooter was writing *Legion of Super-Heroes* when he was 13 but you could be any age. You could be 55 and have always had a hankering to draw a comic strip. This could be your chance to get a paid commission and be in print.

**How big will the event be?**
We'll print up quite a lot of these things, probably around 30,000 copies, so it's a great place for your first stuff to appear. It will be very high profile. I'm going to do it every summer, so this will be the Millarworld 2016 annual.

**Which character are you most looking forward to seeing someone do something new with?**
I think Kick-Ass will be good fun. I'm gonna put them all in there though: Kick-Ass, Hit Girl and things like *Starlight* and *Chrononauts* and Superior. It's all open. They're pretty brand name characters now, especially when they've been in Hollywood films, and I think that's quite attractive. I'm 45 now. It'll be good fun to see somebody who's 18 have a bash at writing Hit Girl.

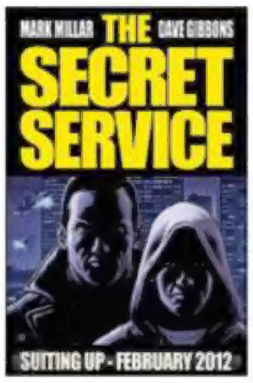
**Are you looking forward to getting out on your UK tour?**
Oh, I cannot wait. Honestly, I really enjoy this stuff. It's always a really fun time. The nice thing is that nobody ever waits two hours in a line to tell you they hate the book! It's lovely to be out there shaking hands with people who enjoyed the book.

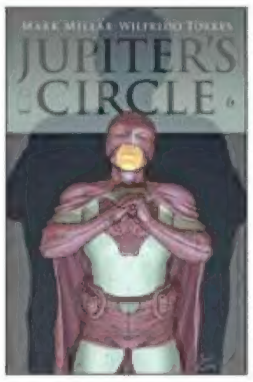
**Tell us a little about *Huck*...**
For me it came together when I went to see *Man Of Steel*. I love Superman, but I remember when Superman kills Zod thinking, "Superman's solution was to snap a guy's neck?" It's like Mickey Mouse snapping a guy's neck!

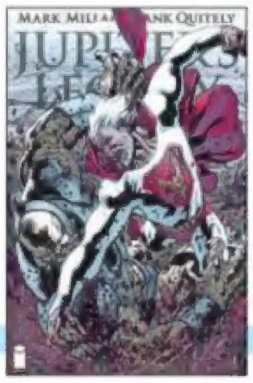
So I just thought, I'm going to try and create something that's really interesting and make it as upbeat as I possibly could.

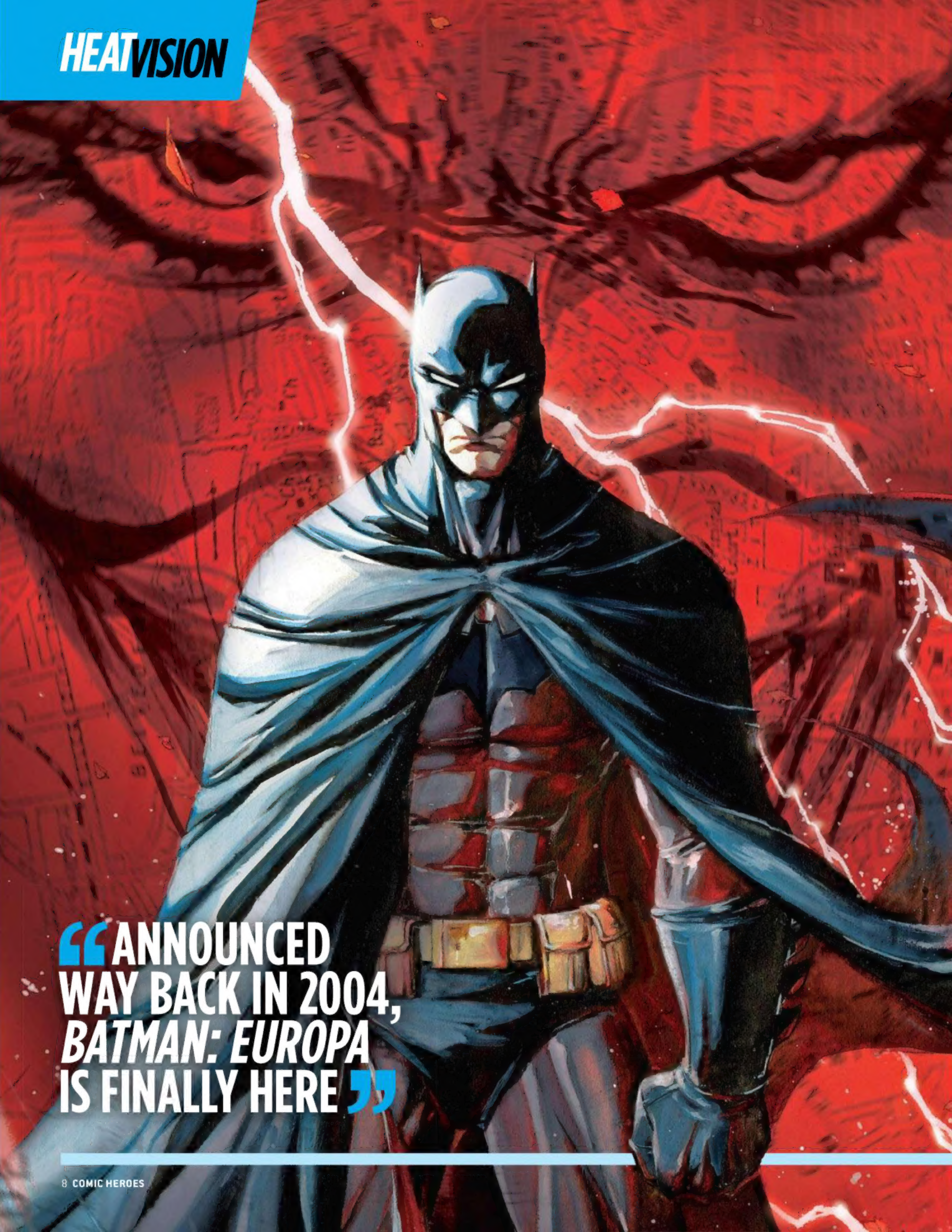
I remember, I did this volunteer thing and there was this guy there who had learning difficulties. His thing was he'd do a good deed every day and that always stayed with me. It was such a nice way of life and it seemed like such an inherently superheroey thing to do. This character is based a bit on that. He has no family, but he has these special abilities and he decides, "I want to do something good every day, even if it's something small".

I wanted to do a series that was a bit superheroey but also something that felt a bit like *Forrest Gump*. Something that would make you feel good about the world. One of my friends said "he's Forrest Gump meets Captain America". That's the setup line and it goes from there and just goes crazy. It's going to be an ongoing series, but told in runs of six issues. Rafael Albuquerque is about halfway through drawing it at the moment.









“ANNOUNCED WAY BACK IN 2004, *BATMAN: EUROPA* IS FINALLY HERE”

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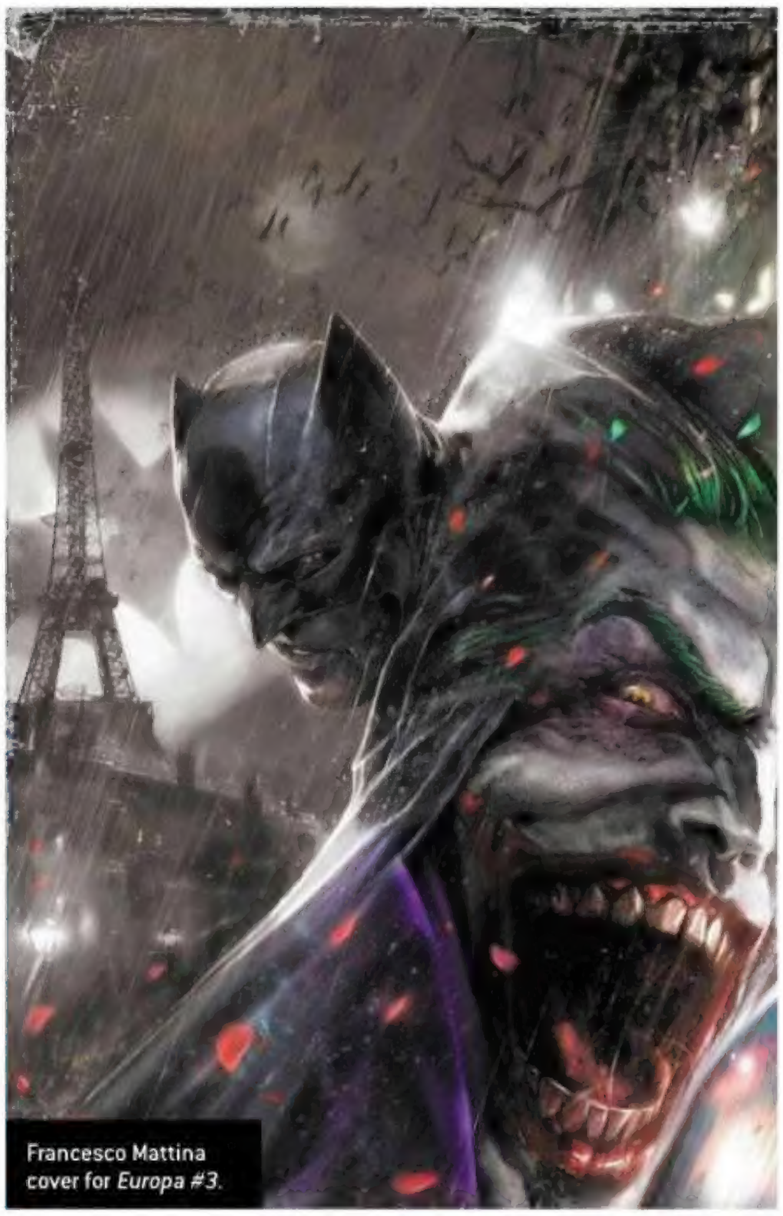
# LATE KNIGHT TALES

## A mere 11 years after it was first announced, *Batman: Europa* is finally scheduled in...



Francesco Mattina cover for *Europa #3*.

**There's a grand tradition of comics running late, but few have been quite so tardy as *Batman: Europa*. Announced way back in 2004, it's finally due out this November. Probably.**

Written by Brian Azzarello and Matteo Casali, with pencils from Jim Lee and Giuseppe Camuncoli, the limited run series finds the Dark Knight running out of time as he contracts a deadly virus. He has one unlikely hope: the Joker. Together the two arch-enemies go on a European road-trip to try to find a cure. There's no word, as yet, on whether they'll be stopping off at the Louvre or taking in some shows along the way.

Getting Jim Lee back on a Bat-book is a pretty big deal – though there seems to be a subtle caveat. DC's solicitation for the series says the first issue is pencilled and inked by Jim Lee, which rather suggests that the rest of it is not.

Still, exciting times. *Europa* has been on and off the schedules for years now, last appearing back in 2011, but it really does honestly look like we're finally getting the thing on 18 November.

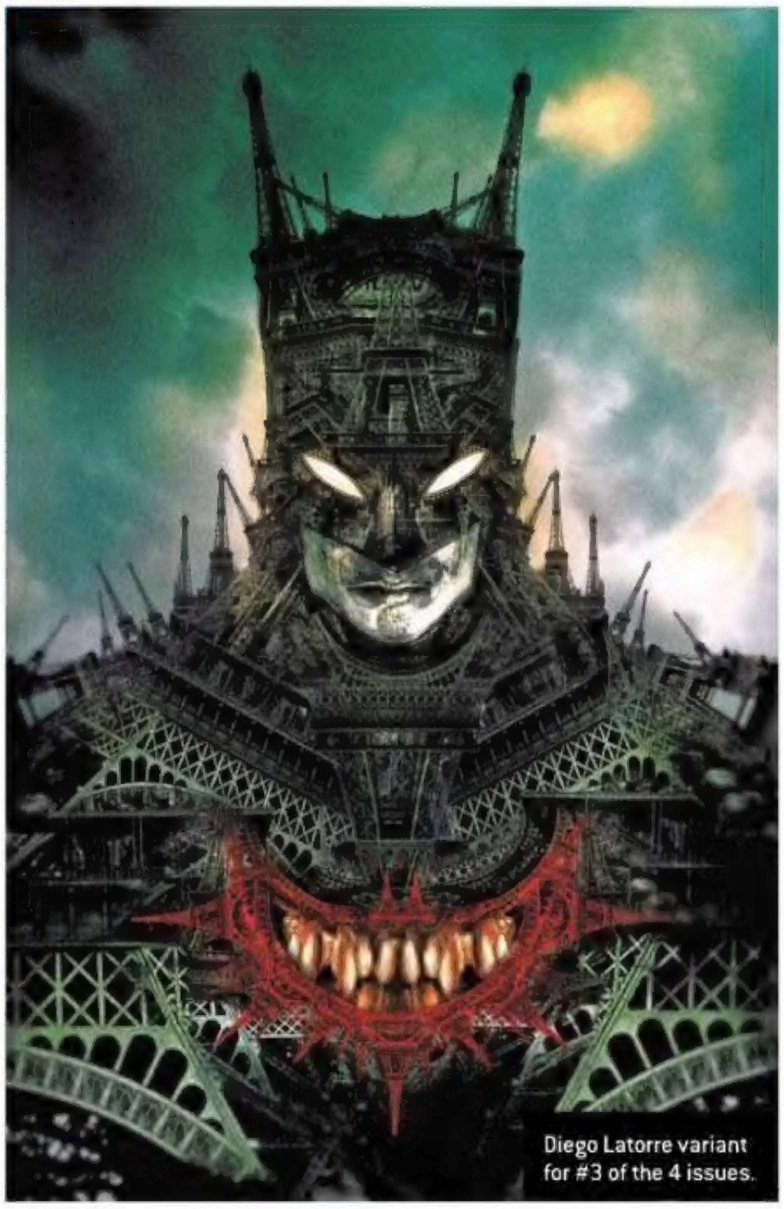
### DARK KNIGHT RETURNS... AGAIN

There will be a third volume of Frank Miller's much-lauded *Dark Knight* saga. *Dark Knight III: The Master Race* (no, seriously) has been penned by Frank Miller and Brian Azzarello, with Andy Kubert and Klaus Janson on art duties. At the time of going to press very little is known about the story, though DC is calling it "The epic ending you never saw coming". It is of course the sequel to Miller's epochal *The Dark Knight Returns,* which changed the face of comics in 1987, and 2002's *The Dark Knight Strikes Again*. Despite the mixed reception to Miller's recent Bat-books, the thought of him working on a new *Dark Knight* title is still an exciting one. It will be published later this year by DC.

### FINGER ACKNOWLEDGED

In other Bat news to warm the cockles, an agreement has been made that writer Bill Finger will be posthumously acknowledged as having been involved in Batman's creation. Finger was the ghostwriter who worked alongside Bob Kane in the '30s to help create the character and his world – and, rumour has it, was involved in defining the look of the caped crusader.

Despite that, he didn't receive the same levels of recognition for his input. This new deal means that he will receive a credit on the *Gotham* TV show and the upcoming *Batman Vs Superman: Dawn Of Justice* movie. For its part, DC has already acknowledged Finger's contribution. A reissue of *Detective Comics #27*, which marked Batman's debut, has been amended to include a credit for the writer.



Diego Latorre variant for #3 of the 4 issues.

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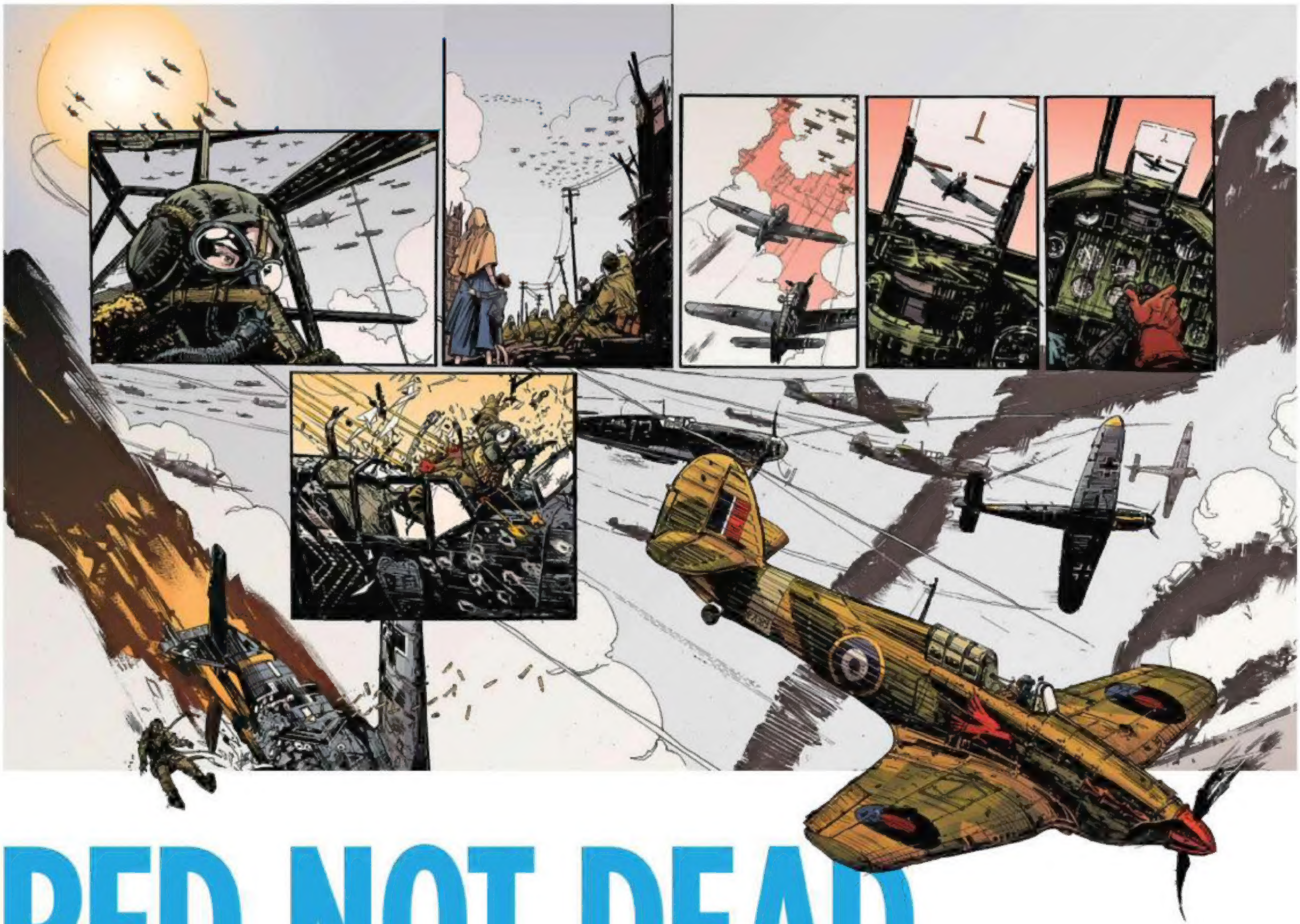


# RED NOT DEAD

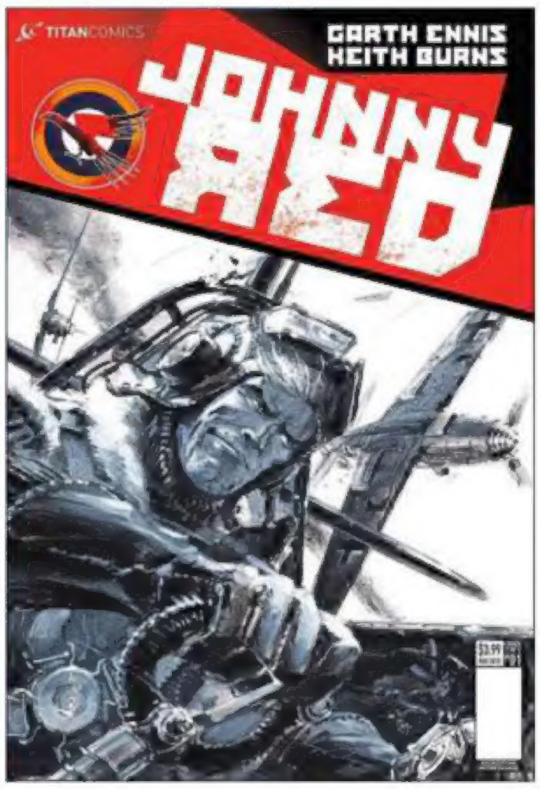
One of the most popular characters from classic British war comics is back! **Stephen Jewell** talks to writer **Garth Ennis**

**Auspiciously debuting in *Battle #100* in 1977, *Johnny Red* was one of the weekly war comic's most popular stories during its 13-year existence.** Consigned to the Russian Front, crack RAF fighter ace Johnny Redburn is set to soar through the skies again in a new Titan Comics miniseries written by Garth Ennis and drawn by Keith Burns. Having previously explored the impact of the Second World War in creator-owned series like *Battlefields* and *War Stories*, the *Preacher* scribe is relishing the opportunity to revive one of his childhood favourites.

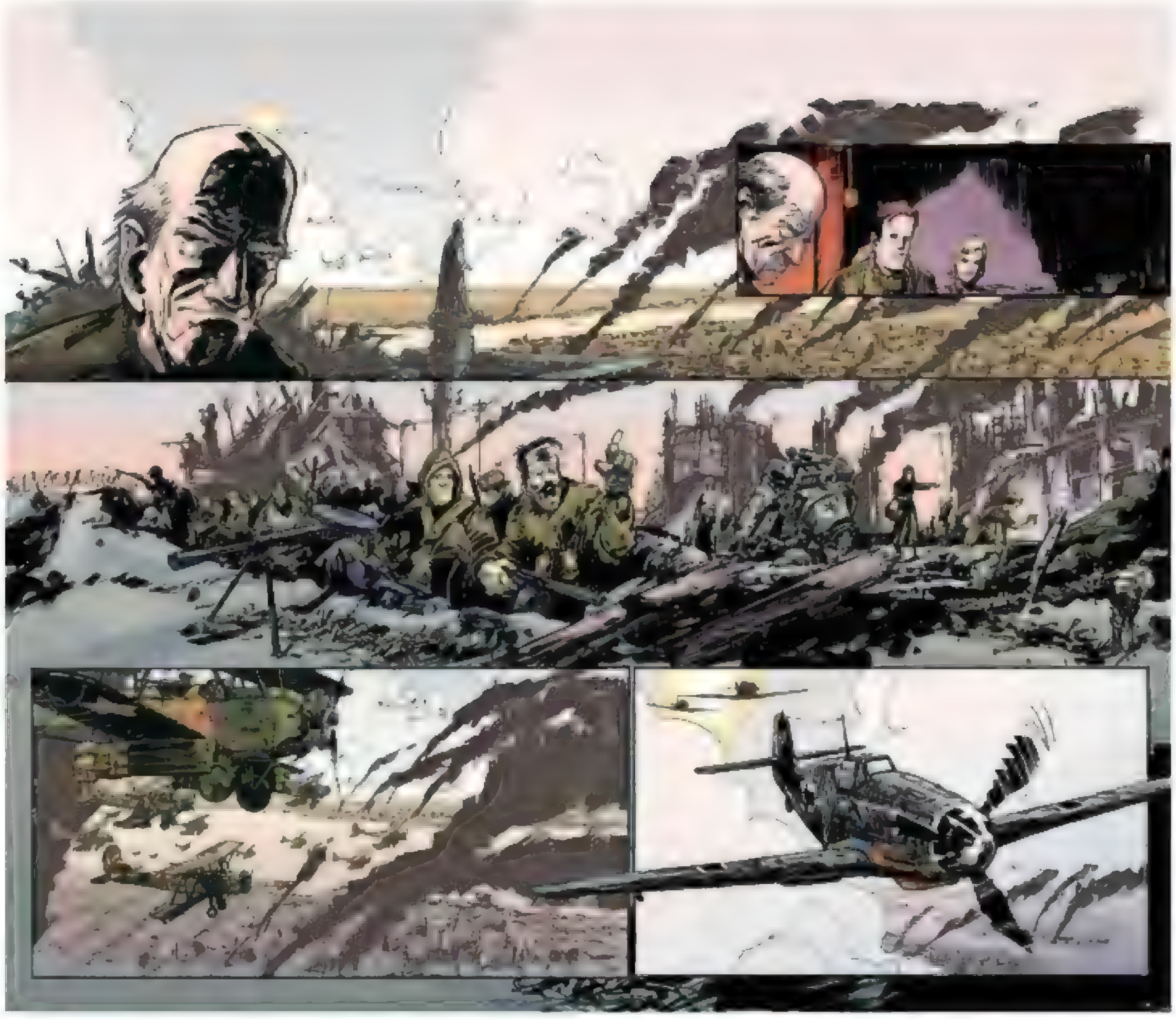
"At its best," Ennis told us with evident enthusiasm, "*Johnny Red* stands shoulder-to-shoulder with *Darkie's Mob* and *HMS Nightshade*, and is really only eclipsed by *Charley's War*. I like Johnny's scruffy demeanour, his get-the-job-done attitude and his enjoyment of life as a fighter pilot."

*Johnny Red* was originally written by Tom Tully, but Ennis hasn't attempted to replicate the *2000 AD* veteran's distinctive prose style. "I'm never going to be able to write that frantic dialogue of his," claims Ennis. "That said, I think I've been true to the characters and setting, and I've done a good deal of research into the period, as Tully clearly did too."

Ennis describes supporting character Nina Petrova, the so-called "Angel of Death", as one of the first truly strong female characters in British comics and a forerunner of Judges Anderson and



**Above:** Like many British comics characters of his time, Johnny Red had a twist or two: after being thrown out of the RAF, he flew with the Russians, and he had a splinter in his skull that caused blurred vision at critical moments. It remains to be seen how much of this Ennis will run with!



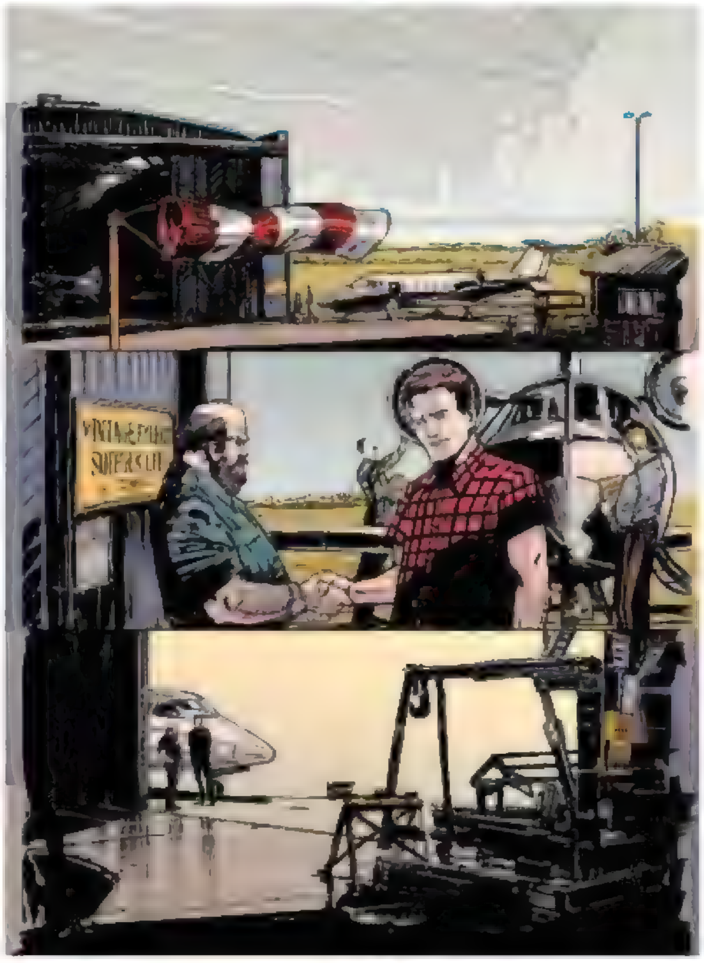
Hershey. "Long before they appeared, there was Nina, thumping Johnny for mouthing off in the very first episode," laughs Ennis. He has set the story during the darkest period of the battle for Stalingrad: "The Russians are on the ropes and Falcon Squadron are escorting Nina's Angels of Death on extremely hazardous daylight supply missions over the city. Then the squadron gets two new Commissars, with a mysterious plan that demands our heroes' involvement. It may not work well for them, as someone has panicked and done something very dangerous indeed."

Keith Burns, a full member of the Guild of Aviation Artists, admits that it was initially "a terrifying prospect" to follow original *Johnny Red* artists Joe Colquhoun and John Cooper, both of whom have now passed away.

"What I take from Joe Colquhoun's work is worn-out pilots, accurate aircraft, movement and drama – it really has everything," he says. "I take the same from John Cooper, and although his aircraft were never as accurate, his style was much more expressive, with great character and composition. My aircraft lean more towards realism and capturing their movement, but I try to keep the figures more towards the comics end." CH

***Johnny Red #1 is published by Titan on 4 November.***

> **"I'VE BEEN TRUE TO THE CHARACTERS AND THE SETTING"**

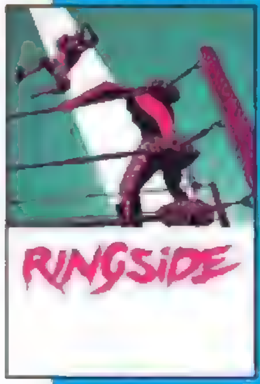


JOHNNY RED © EGMONT. IMAGES © TITAN COMICS

## IN THE FRAME

ANNOUNCEMENTS, INFO AND OTHER INTERESTING STUFF...

### LORDS OF THE RING

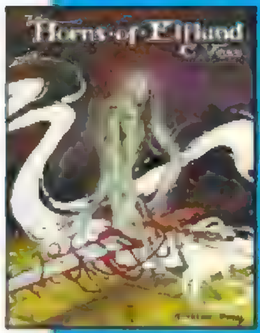


The next ongoing series from Joe Keatinge and artist Nick Barber is *Ringside*. Set in the world of professional wrestling, it deals with the struggles both inside and outside the ring, but Barber insists it will have appeal to everyone, not just sports fans. It's on sale 25 November from Image.

### MORE MANGA

You only need to glance at the shelves of a Forbidden Planet to see how big sales of manga are. Dark Horse has taken notice too. It's stated, in an interview with AnimeNewsNetwork, that it plans to increase its manga output by 25 percent by 2016.

### FEELING HORNS-Y?



Charles Vess's first published work, *The Horns Of Elfland*, is getting a long-overdue reissue this year from Archival Press. Originally published in 1979, these tales of fairies and witches should be of particular interest to fans of *Stardust*, on which Vess collaborated with Neil Gaiman.

### I WAKFU, DO U?

Titan has announced a new ongoing comic based on Wakfu, the hugely popular online role-playing game and TV show. The series, written by Kahel with art from Mig, debuts on 11 November. We've got no idea what the title means.

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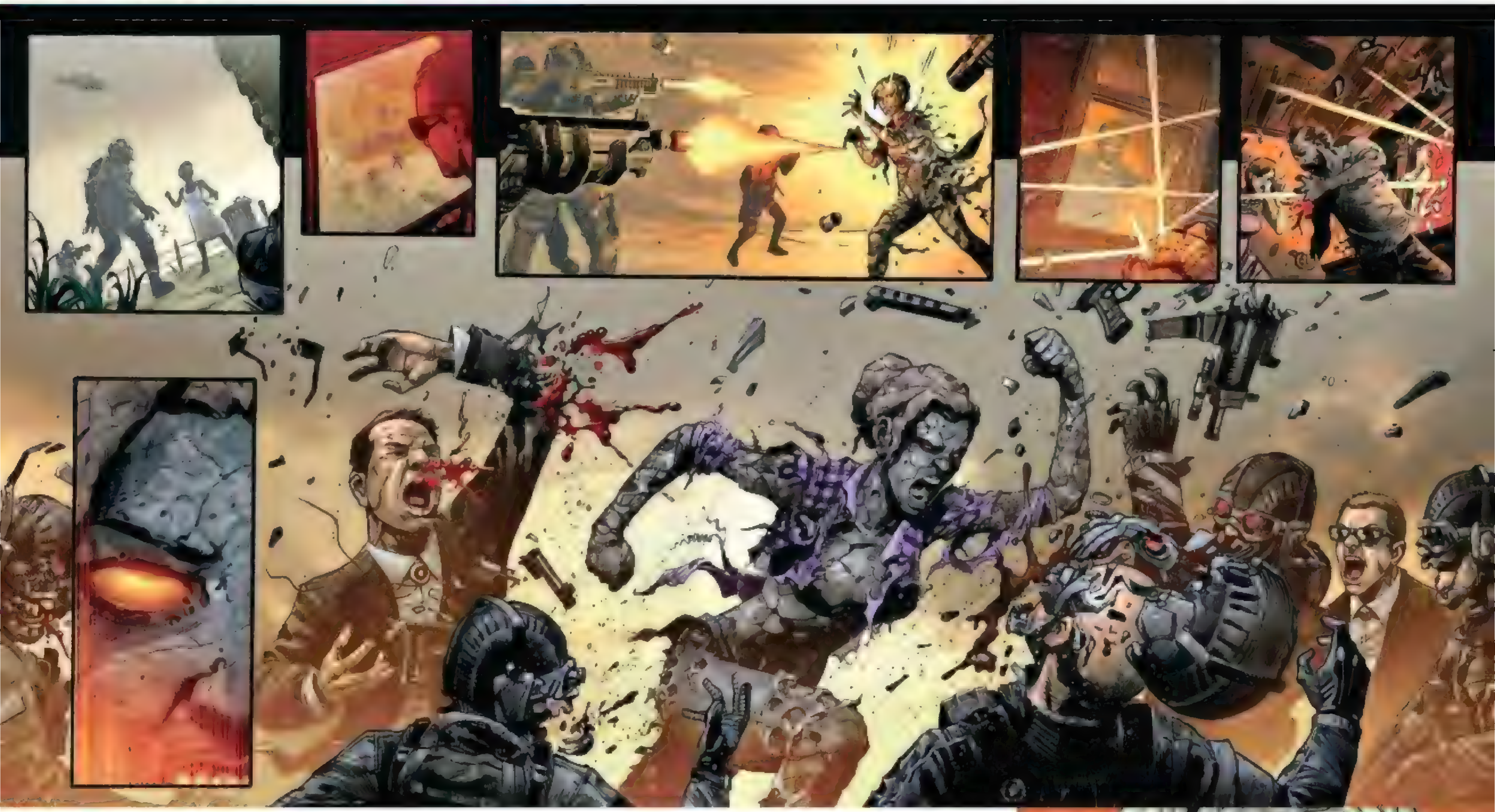
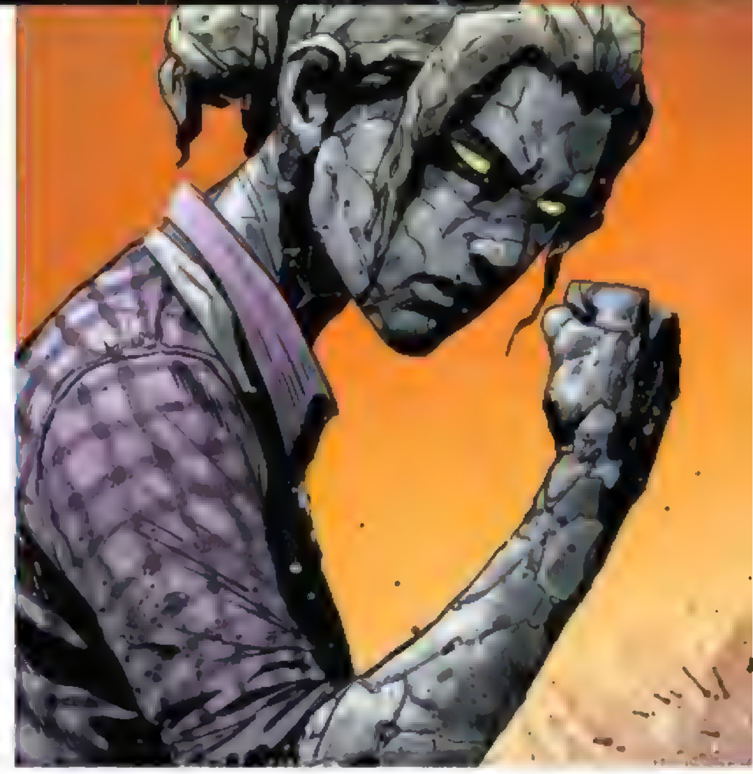


# SUPER TROOPERS

Director and actor **Noel Clarke** is venturing into comics, as he tells **Stephen Jewell** about *The Troop*...



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**Resembling *Skins* crossed with the X-Men, Noel Clarke's *The Troop* is taking an unflinching approach to the traditional adolescent super-team formula.** Illustrated by Joshua Cassara, the five-issue miniseries will see its characters tackling very real problems.

"I don't want to jump on a soap box and I'm not a teenager anymore," says Clarke. "But when I was, the teen books, while fun, didn't relate to me. I was having loads of sex and I knew people who were taking drugs, had been abused or were self-harming. None of those books could really tackle those issues, they could only skirt around and insinuate because the Comics Code governed them all."

Known for playing Mickey Smith in *Doctor Who* and writing, directing and starring in films like *Kidulthood* and *The Anomaly*, the 39-year-old is a long time comic fan. "I grew up in what at the time was a rough place," recalls Clarke, who hails from West London. "Being mostly a loner, comics were my thing, where I could get away from everything else."

The various members of *The Troop* are initially spread out all over the globe. "They become a crew of friends," says Clarke. "The team is big but not all of them will be there at the end."

Lead by Terrain, described as "an Australian girl who turns to rock", The Troop ranks also include Virus, "the youngest of the team who can give anyone any virus"; Torrent who can "turn herself into water and control moisture" and Chalice who is "a beautiful black woman. There are a few greats like Storm, but generally there aren't enough black women in comics." CH

**Above:** Some of the action-packed scenes from the first issue of Clarke and Cassara super-saga, *The Troop* Rock on

***The Troop #1 is published by Titan Comics on 9 December***

# ELECTRICOMICS UNLEASHED

**Alan Moore admits that he's useless with technology and isn't really involved with the comics scene these days.** Despite this he – along with daughter Leah Moore, John Reppion and a host of other creators – has invented a new "digital comics ecosystem" which has just been released for iOS devices (Android is to follow, subject to funding). Install the free *Electricomics* app and you get four stories – and they're not just standard comics, but innovative interactive experiences.

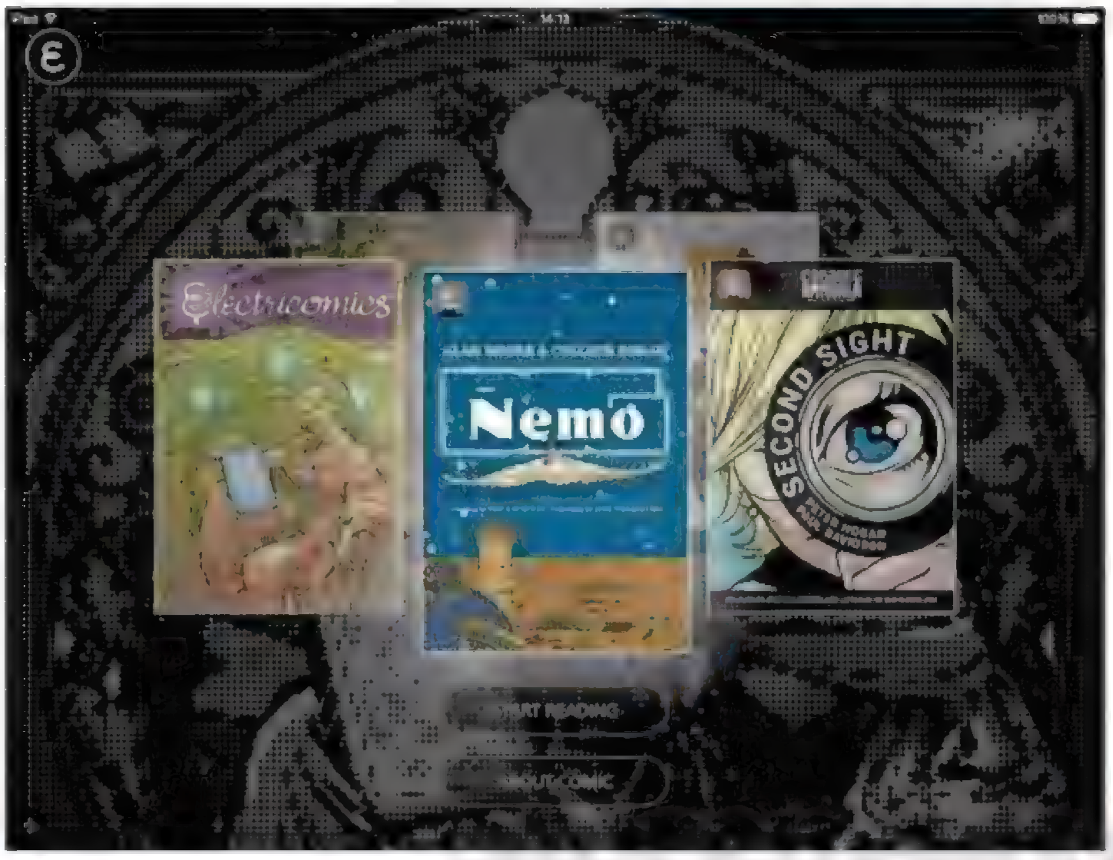
> “AN EXCITING ATTEMPT TO EXPLORE DIGITAL COMICS”

"Red Horse" by Garth Ennis is a moving story of WW1 beautifully painted by Frank Victoria, which you scroll through. "Sway" by Leah Moore and John Reppion with art by Nicola Scott, is a sci-fi tale that you swipe through... until, at a certain point, you tilt the screen to drop into a different time and travel in a different direction. In "Big Nemo", written by Alan Moore with art by Colleen Doran, you tap to advance through the story – but this doesn't just mean the next panel appears: elements might animate or change subtly or move to different positions. "Cabaret Amygdala Presents: Second Sight" by Peter Hogan and Paul Davidson is the least linear: you navigate by tapping animated hotspots but also need to find clues to build a different, darker picture and discover much more.

The four comics each in their own way, represent an exciting attempt to explore what "digital comics" could mean and expand them beyond just viewing panels on-screen. The next step is the release of an open source creator tool, promised soon, which will enable all kinds of creators to create, package and publish their own digital comics. CH

***Find out more at electricomics.net and watch for more about Electricomics in Comic Heroes soon!***

**Below:** Some of the amazing titles you can read for free right now on the app



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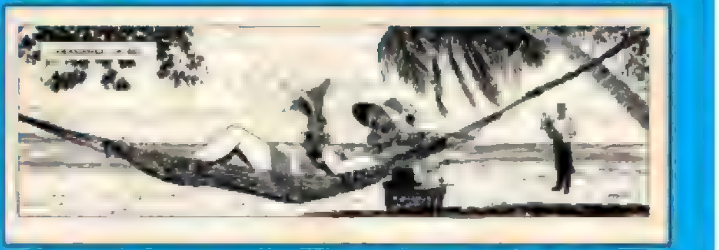
## GOLDTIGER ROARS!

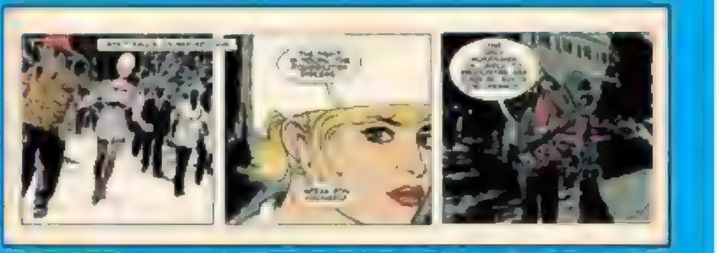
### THIS FAUX-'60S STRIP LOOKS LIKE A MUST FOR KEEN RETRONAUTS

**Rebellion is breaking old habits by publishing two new graphic novels that – in a first for the Oxford-based company – aren't related to their flagship title, *2000 AD*.**

Goldtiger may well be the best '60s comic you've never read. That's because it's not from the '60s at all. The brainchild of Guy Adams and Jimmy Broxton, Goldtiger began life as a Kickstarter-funded project back in 2013, but its retro look and feel is dazzlingly authentic. It's described as being like a mixture of *Modesty Blaise* and *The Amazing Adventures of Kreeler & Clay*. Sounds groovy to us.



Rebellion's Mike Molcher says: "With incredible veracity and a feel for the period, Adams and Broxton uncover the touching story of the creators behind the '60s most surprising secret agents. This volume collects together an archive of 'behind the scenes' material of the strip that never was – letters, scripts, interviews, sketches – all documenting the creation of the strip and the outlandish lives of its creators and their unbelievable brush with *2000 AD*." Unbelievable is right, but this looks like an entertaining and beautifully illustrated venture from the publisher.



Also coming soon is a new edition of *Scarlet Traces*, Ian Edginton and D'Israeli's steampunk saga. The series posits a world where humanity has reverse engineered the technology left behind during the Martian invasion in HG Wells' War Of The Worlds. Originally published online it was later serialised by Dark Horse, and is now being published in a new edition, with additional stories.

"'Is Scarlet Traces going to be reprinted?' and 'Is there going to be another series?' are the two questions we're always asked when we do signings and conventions," says Edginton. "It pleases me no end to say that I can now give hearty 'yes' to both."

© 2015 REBELLION

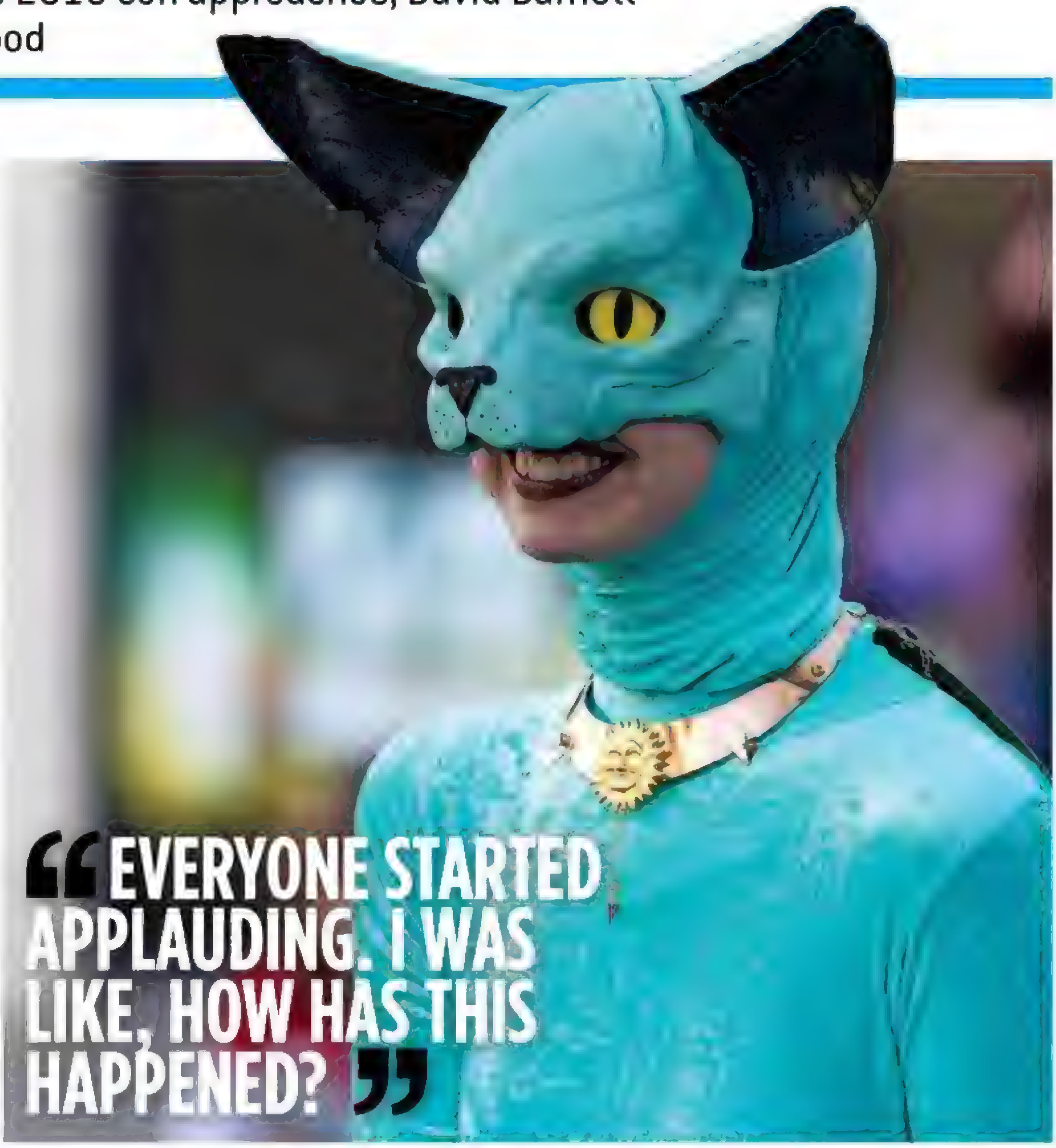
# THE CON IS ON!

As Leeds' Thought Bubble 2015 con approaches, David Barnett talks to organiser Lisa Wood

**It takes a lot to upstage Warren Ellis announcing a new comics project, but Thought Bubble, the Leeds-based convention that's been quietly building up to become perhaps the most important UK comics event, managed it this year.**

Ellis was on stage with his artist collaborator, Tula Lotay, at the Image Expo in San Francisco in July to unveil their new horror title *Heartless* when it was mentioned that Tula – not-so-secret identity Lisa Wood – was also the founder and director of Thought Bubble, which takes place in West Yorkshire every November.

"Everyone started cheering and applauding," says Lisa. "It was a bit of a shock. I was like, how's that happened?"



"EVERYONE STARTED APPLAUDING. I WAS LIKE, HOW HAS THIS HAPPENED?"

© 2015 STEVE BAROWIK

## INSTANT SUCCESS

How indeed. Thought Bubble is now in its ninth year, and Lisa (she adopted her alter ego for her comics work after fearing her given name was too anonymous for people to find her online) couldn't have envisaged how it was going to take off when she first mooted the idea of staging a northern convention in 2007.

She was working at Leeds' Travelling Man comic shop at the time and had no experience of event management. "I'd never organised anything before," says Lisa. This was gently pointed out to her. She went ahead and organised it anyway, with some support and advice from the organisers of the Leeds Film Festival, who offered to share some of their event space... in the basement of Leeds Town Hall.

"I was hoping maybe a couple of hundred people would turn up, if we were lucky," says Lisa. "In the end, we got 500 over the weekend."

She hadn't seen anything yet. Thought Bubble grew and grew. Last year something like 11,000 people attended the events. This year is expected to be even bigger. And its reputation is growing, too.

Lisa says, "I was at Comic-Con in San Diego and people were coming up to me, telling me they'd heard about Thought Bubble."

## GLOBAL APPEAL

The guest list is a who's who of comic talent from all disciplines and from around the globe. This year alone you're going to see Becky Cloonan, Kate Beaton, John Reppion, Leah Moore, Sean Phillips, David Lloyd, Kieron Gillen and Jamie McKelvie... And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

In fact, you'll see Gillen and McKelvie there every year, whether there's a *Phonogram* or *Wicked + Divine* to promote or not. Gillen says: "Thought Bubble's growth has basically dovetailed with the renaissance in British comics in the same period. It's grown from scrappy and charming into the highlight of the British cons calendar.

"There's larger cons. There's artier cons. There's cons which serve one part of the genre more. But there's nothing which is a snapshot of an egalitarian culture like Thought Bubble, with world superstars on adjacent tables to kids with their first black and white zines. If

**Above:** One of the many, many cosplayers who attend Thought Bubble each year. [illegible] a blast and you's [illegible] go in November.

StoreMags.com

you want to know what comics is like at its best, you go to Thought Bubble."

Gillen and McKelvie love Thought Bubble, so much so that their annual post-con DJ session is now a beloved fixture of the event.

Gillen agrees: "It has the best dance floor in all comics. If you want to see how comic fans can throw down given a little encouragement, the after party is it. That we get to DJ there is a blessing."

Thought Bubble has long since outgrown its bit of space in the Town Hall basement – now it takes over the Royal Armouries site on Leeds docks. In fact, it's outgrowing that as well, but Lisa is determined to remain loyal to the vision of a West Yorkshire convention she dreamed up years ago.

"We have sat down in the past and wondered if we might have to move, maybe to Manchester or somewhere, due to space and venue costs," says Lisa. "It's always more and more of a challenge every year, fitting it all in. But I don't think we could move out of Leeds after all this time."

That's because Thought Bubble isn't just a place for comic fans – in fact, it works to avoid that. Unlike most other cons, it's knitted into the fabric of the community. The Thought Bubble team work with local groups in Leeds and Bradford who deal with refugees and people with autism, for example, to ensure all sectors of the community can get access to the world of comics. Children get in free and the ticket costs are deliberately kept low to ensure accessibility to all.

"We've always been about inclusivity," says Lisa. "People go away from the event and talk about how friendly it is, how welcoming. That's what we've always aimed for."

The pressures have only increased with Lisa's art career taking off so massively in the past year or two. Since 2013 she's had art and/or cover credits on as diverse titles as *Adventures of Superman*, the Vertigo anthology *Bodies*, Image's *Supreme Blue Rose*, *The Wicked + The Divine*, and of course the new *Heartless* title from Image.

## A FRIENDLY CONVENTION

"There's so much going on!" says Lisa, who's also finding herself jet-setting off from leafy Ilkley – where she breaks away from the art desk to get up on the dramatic moors for "exercise and sanity" – to cons, expos and signings around the world.

That's meant her time on Thought Bubble is squeezed tighter… but thankfully she's got a team headed up by Martha Julian and Clark Burscough to help steer the con to fruition every year. But no matter how busy she gets as Tula Lotay, Lisa Wood's heart will always be in the friendliest comic con on the calendar.

And Kieron Gillen wholeheartedly agrees. You can almost see the contented smile on his face as he sighs: "Basically, I look on Thought Bubble as my Christmas."

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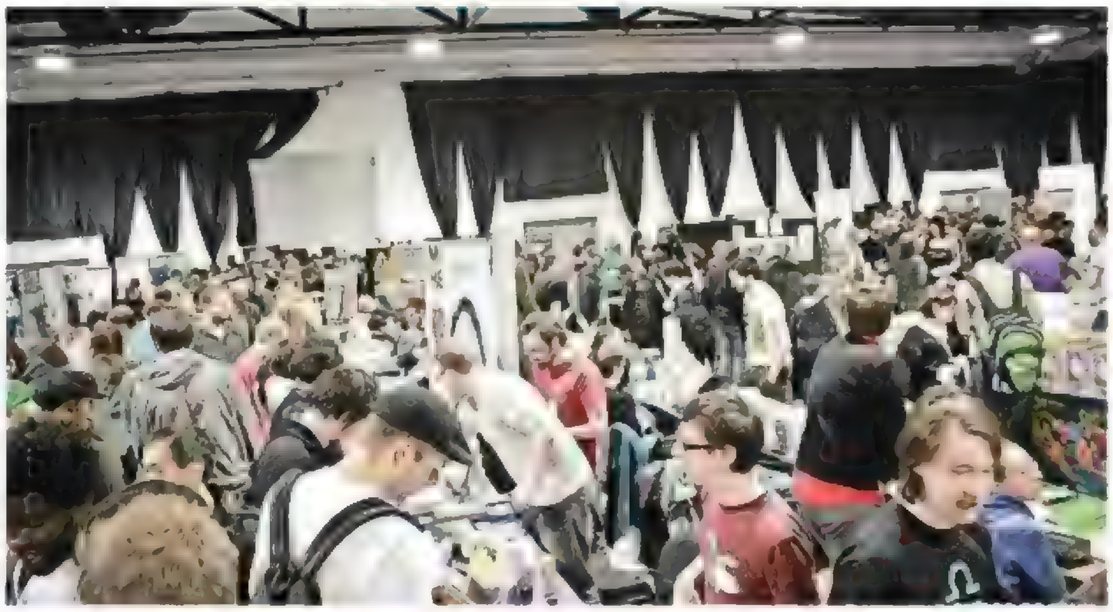
***Thought Bubble runs November 9-15 in Leeds. www.thoughtbubblefestival.com***

**Above:** Everyone is welcome at Thought Bubble, from the tallest Stormtroopers to the littlest bounty hunters.

**Below:** Thought Bubble seems to grow bigger and bigger every year.



## IN THE FRAME

ANNOUNCEMENTS, INFO AND OTHER INTERESTING STUFF...

### PANTHER RETURNS

Black Panther will return in spring 2016 written by New York Times bestselling author Ta-Nehisi Coates and with art by legendary artist Brian Stelfreeze. The first arc is titled 'A Nation Under Our Feet'.

### JULY THE 5TH?

Titan have announced that Independence Day sequel *Independence Day: Resurgence* will get a prequel in the form of a comic filling in the gaps between the films.

### DEAD OR ALIVE?

DC has uncancelled *The Omega Men* thanks to fan reaction. They had announced that the series would end with #7 but now say it will run to at least #12. Three other titles are still ending though: *Justice League United*, *Gotham by Midnight* and *Lobo*.

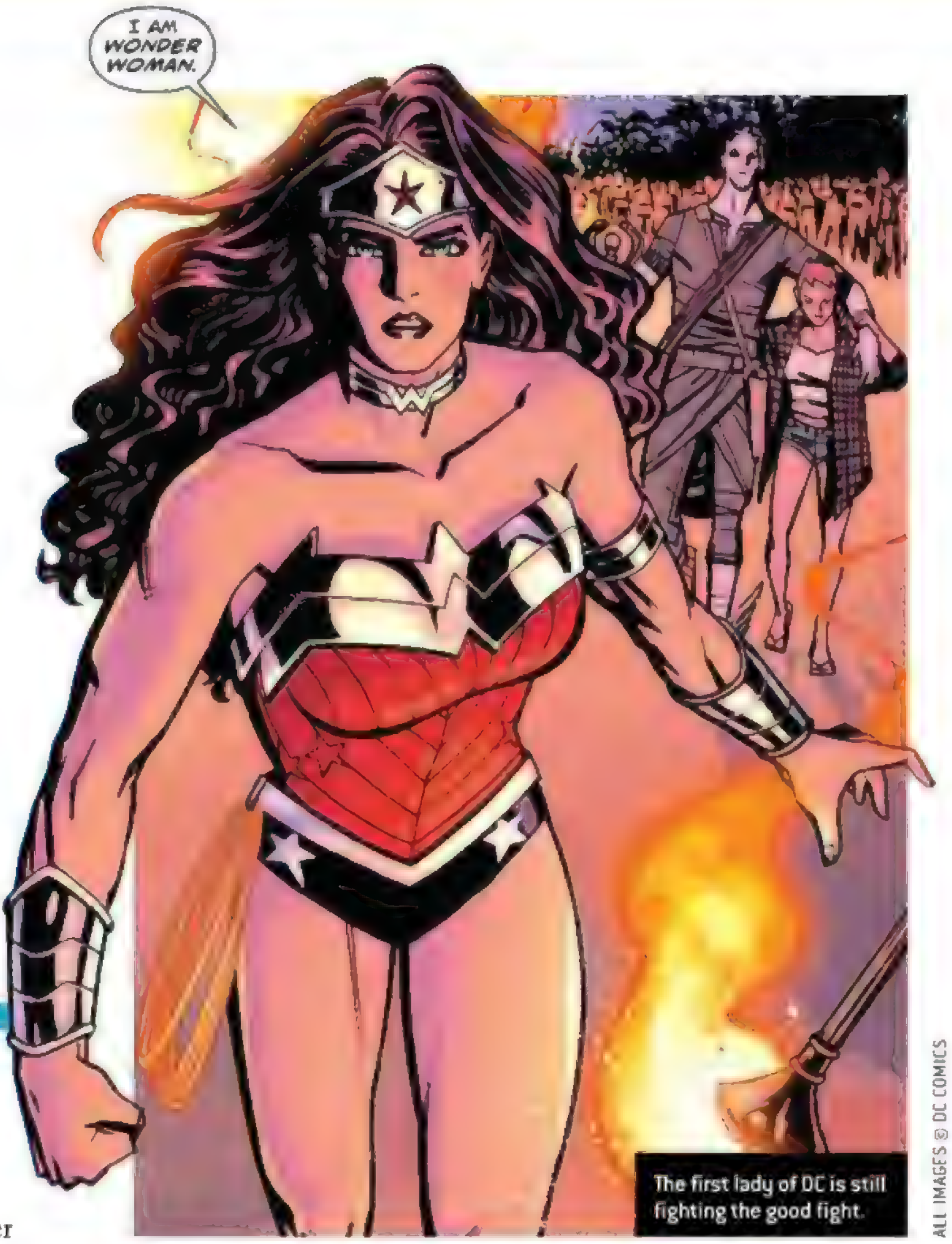
### HOLY COPYRIGHT, BATMAN!

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled – surprise! – that DC owns the Batmobile. DC and Warner Bros had sued car maker Mark Towle, who'd reportedly made "nearly $200,000" selling full-sized replicas of the Batmobile from the '60s TV show and the 1989 Tim Burton movie.

THOUGHT BUBBLE PHOTOGRAPHS ON THIS PAGE © 2015 MICHAEL BRACEWELL

# SECRET HISTORY

Harvard historian Jill Lepore digs deep into the story of Wonder Woman in an insightful new book. **Paul Gravett** finds out more


I AM WONDER WOMAN.

The first lady of DC is still fighting the good fight.

ALL IMAGES © DC COMICS

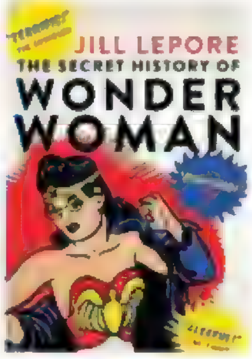
As the chair of Harvard's History and Literature programme, Jill Lepore has spent her life writing about real world subjects such as slavery and the history of pioneer Jane Franklin. For her latest book, however, she's set her sights on someone rather different: Princess Diana of Themyscira – Wonder Woman.

**What roles did Wonder Woman play in the struggle for women's rights?**
Wonder Woman debuted in 1941 and fought for women's rights. She fought for democracy, too, since superhero comics in the 1940s were all about WW2. But as she was originally conceived, she was fighting for equal rights for women. And as a matter of history, she was inspired by, and based on, British and American suffragists, feminists, and birth control activists.

> “SHE WAS ABOUT FIGHTING FOR EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN”

**How did William Moulton Marston's relationships with the women in his life contribute to Wonder Woman?**
Marston married his childhood sweetheart Elizabeth Holloway in 1915, but in 1925 a younger woman named Olive Byrne moved in, and they lived as a threesome, raising their children together. Librarian Margaret Wilkes Huntley also lived with them occasionally over the years. Each was important to Marston's ideas about female power and contributed to Wonder Woman. But Olive Byrne made a particular connection: her mother, Ethel Byrne, was arrested in 1916 for opening America's first birth-control clinic. Ethel Byrne was a nurse like her sister, Margaret Sanger and they founded what became Planned Parenthood.

**Wonder Woman's Golden Age exploits are infamous for frequent scenes of women in chains. How do you interpret Marston's fixation?**
There are many interpretations. At the time, critics of Wonder Woman found the chains grotesque and demeaning. One member of DC's editorial board resigned in protest over them. Marston insisted the chains were meant allegorically: he intended Wonder Woman to be a symbol of the emancipated woman. To become emancipated from the tyranny of men, she had to be chained up by evil villains (who, generally, opposed women's rights) so that she could emancipate herself. But he and many readers also found bondage exciting. Still, in the 1910s and 1920s, suffragists, feminists, and birth-control activists all used chains in their iconography. I think Marston intended to carry on that tradition. That it also meant something else, though, is undeniable.



**Above:** Academic Jill Lepore and her new book, which delves deep into the history and real world inspirations for the famous character

**What made Wonder Woman more than just a 'damsel in distress'?**
Damsels in distress are standard in present-day movies too. That doesn't make them sensible or appealing. Wonder Woman came from a different tradition – of depicting women as Amazons, promoting the idea that women are stronger than men, that love is stronger than brute force. Since Marston's death in 1947, much of that has been lost. Wonder Woman became just a female superman, whose strength is force.

**How do we make Wonder Woman relevant today?**
We still need equal pay and equal rights, which she was fighting for in the '40s. I wish the original Wonder Woman were irrelevant, but she is not. CH

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***Jill Lepore's new book, The Secret History Of Wonder Woman is on sale from 28 October. She will be talking about the book at the British Library on 21 October.***

# ON THE RACKS

We look ahead to some of the other exciting new comics headed our way over the next three months...

## OCTOBER

### CHEWBACCA (MARVEL)

Yes, another of the original Star Wars gang gets the Marvel miniseries treatment. Yes, if it's as good as the recent Lando book we're not going to complain. Gerry Duggan writes and Phil Noto draws the [illegible]. Expect [illegible] and that [illegible] your favourite furball!
*Available 14 October*

### STEAM MAN (DARK HORSE)

Giant steam-powered robot versus [illegible] Martian armies of killer

albino apes and a crazed vampire in the Old West. Written by Mark Alan Miller and Joe R Lansdale, with art by Piotr Kowalski. [illegible] a lot of Steampunk Westerns!
*Available 21 October*

### BATMAN AND ROBIN ETERNAL (DC)

As you may have guessed from the title, this weekly is a sequel to Batman Eternal. It's set to run for six months with Scott Snyder and James Tynion in charge of an intriguing cast of artists and writers.
*Available 7 October*

### HEROES (TITAN)

[illegible] Heroes is back, back, BACK. Titan's original series starts with "Vengeance", a prequel to the new series, written by Seamus Fahey and Zach Craley and drawn by Rubine.
*Available 7 October*

## NOVEMBER

### HUCK (IMAGE)

Mark Millar says all the best old comics were about people you didn't expect becoming empowered. His six-parter with Rafael Albuquerque art is described as "Captain America meets Forrest Gump" with a bright, upbeat and warm Frank Capra vibe.
*Available 18 November*

### CITIZEN JACK (IMAGE)

US politics and horror collide in this new horror comic from Sam

Humphries and Tommy Patterson in which a Satan-worshipping US presidential candidate gets a little campaign help from the demonic realm. Could explain a lot...
*Available 4 November*

### ALL NEW ALL DIFFERENT AVENGERS (MARVEL)

With *Secret Wars* done and dusted (er, sort of), it's time for a new team of Avengers to get together (they really should think of a term for that). Ms Marvel, Nova and many more are in it, and it looks good.
*Available 11 November*

### SUPERMAN: AMERICAN ALIEN (DC)

*Chronicle* screenwriter Max Landis teams up with a number of artists, including Jock and Jae Lee for a seven-issue miniseries focusing on Clark, rather than Supes.
*Available 11 November*

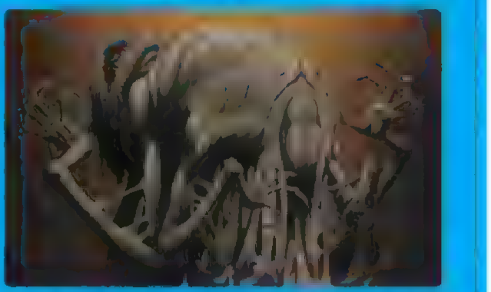
## DECEMBER

### WEIRDWORLD (MARVEL)

Becca is an ordinary girl trapped in "a place where the lost can be found. But only if you're strong enough," according to cryptic Weirdworld scribe Sam Humphries. What we do know is that we're promised swords, sorcery and "kicked out [illegible]". Good enough for us!
*TBC December*

### THE EIGHTH SEAL (IMAGE)

The First Lady's nightmares about transforming into a monster start



to bleed into reality with this print version of the digital horror series from James Tynion IV and a diverse cast of artists. What is all this [illegible] and horror thing, guys?
*TBC December*

### STARBRAND & NIGHTMASK (MARVEL)

Greg Weisman and Domo Stanton bring the two ex-Avengers back to Earth and put them in their trickiest epic yet: college. This new ongoing series looks like a fun collision of the cosmic and everyday.
*TBC December*

### SECRET WARS (MARVEL)

Er, we thought this would be over by now but apparently not. Secret Wars #9 expands on the Battleworld saga, even though we'll all be living in All New, All Different territory by then. Weird.
*TBC December*

**ABOUT LEAH**
Leah Moore is a writer of comics, prose and journalism, as well as the co-founder of the revolutionary *Electricomics*. She has written for *Albion*, *Wild Girls*, *Tom Strong* and more. Follow her on Twitter at **@leahmoore**.

# Defying convention

I began typing this in a tiny courtyard, outside my villa, where the kind folks of Pixelatl had put me while I attended their transmedia festival. The festival promotes and celebrates the creative talent abundant in Mexico in comics, animation and video games.

*Nimona* creator Noelle Stevenson was a guest, as well as *Book Of Life* creator/director Jorge R. Gutiérrez and John Andrews, creator of *Beavis and Butthead*.

### This was a world class event.

I struggled to compute that it was a convention, because there were flamingos and toucans and the setting was a lush tropical garden where people lounged on beanbags in sunshine under palm trees. It was a convention though, with booths selling Cintiq tablets, comic books, art supplies and even remote-controlled drones. There were talks and panels which were always packed out, and where the Q&As felt too short.

We were there partly to judge a comics contest, where creators pitched their projects. If they made it to finalists they would have their comics printed, and if they went on to win they would get tickets to San Diego Comic-Con. It's a big deal.

Myself and Daniel Merlin Goodbrey, one of my co-conspirators on *Electricomics* sat down and heard eight pitches.

Ricardo Farías and Diana Hernández showed us *Inc*, a sci-fi adventure where extremophiles are engineered to give humans the power of invisibility. There was *Aquí Está El* by Oren Juice, a haunting tale where pressures and expectation are visualised in disturbing detail.

*Sinapsistem* by Alberto Hernández Velázquez is set in a sinister world where the rich use the poor in a gruesome video game. And *En Busca de Chimango* by Rodrigo Macareño Bringas is about a young boy's quest for a strange creature which brings him to a library and then adventure.

Our favourite, and stand out talent, was *Un Claro En El Basque* by Alejandra Elena Gámez, where a girl discovers something unexpected in the woods, and finds herself drawn into a strange and mysterious world of fantasy and folklore.

Finalists were *El Nahualo* by Mario Garza and Juan Manuel Colín. A beautifully drawn

INC
01
MOUNTAIN
TEETH
EL CURIOSO MUNDO DE NATHAN
100
SUMMON'S
ROMPE-ACERO

mythological adventure featuring diverse creatures from Mexican folklore, and *Egoista* by José Garcia, with his incredible line work, and innovative story about social media. We also picked out *@ElTwitIllustrado*, which turns tweets from the artists' timeline into one panel gags.

> **"There was not one that resembled a mainstream comic in style or content"**

There was not one that resembled a mainstream comic, in style or content. Not one that was not as unique as its creator.

I am used to a convention circuit where creative talent is brilliant, but where the goal seems to be to enter the mainstream, a big brand clique who have control of a small cast of characters.

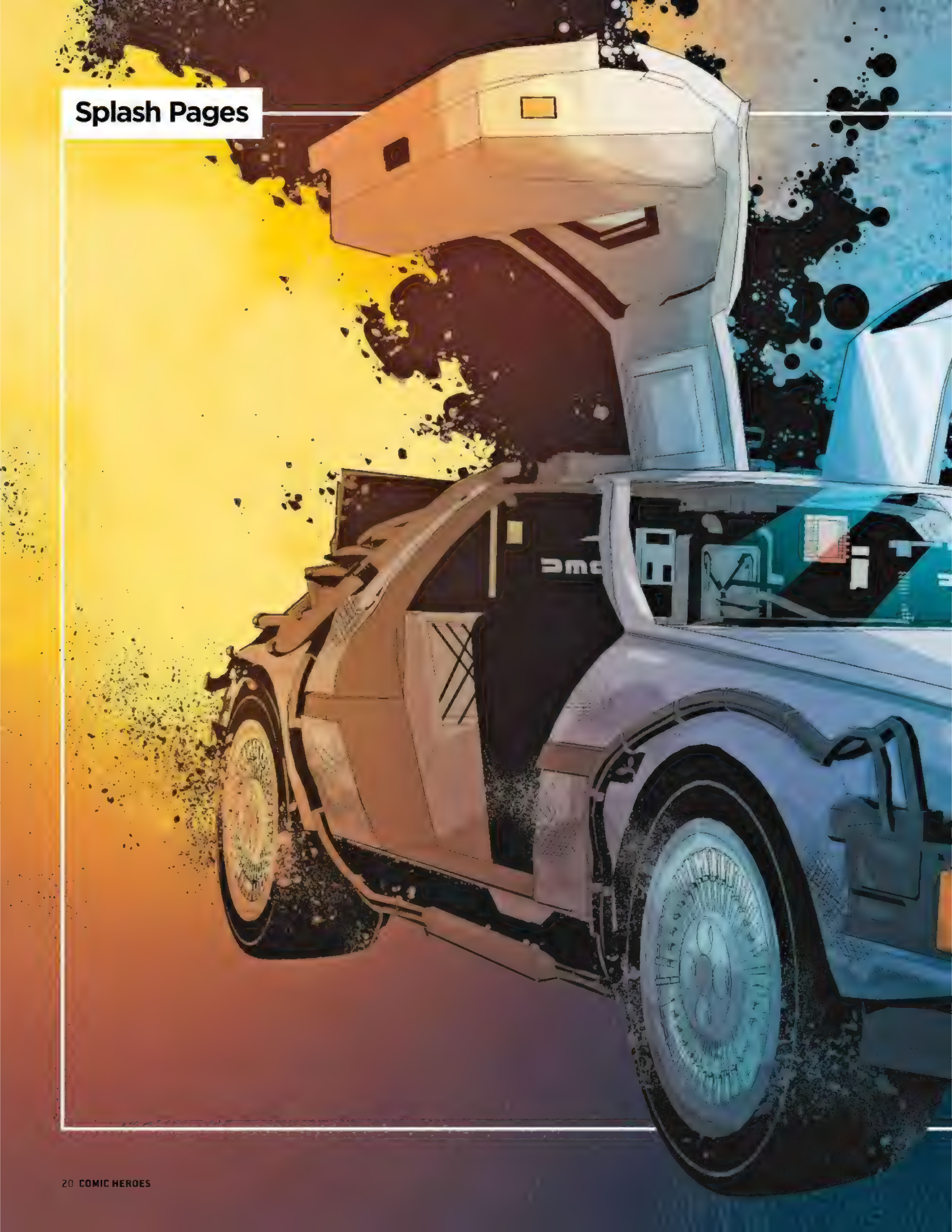
There are many creators and publishers who strive to bring something original to the market, but on the convention floor, attendees are bombarded with the same logos, the same merch, the same properties.

We must be careful not to conflate the infinitely malleable medium of comics with the industry of comics, which remains tied to practices from over 60 years ago.

Comics as an industry has every opportunity to innovate. Every series, and issue is a chance to bring something fresh and there are creators and publishers who do succeed and do that. They make things that are unique and full of heart, and I would urge creators and readers to seek out this novelty.

I am not suggesting that we should throw away the cultural bedrock on which the whole medium is grounded, far from it, but we should try to make comics that nobody else could make; things that speaks from our hearts, and which contain some part of us.

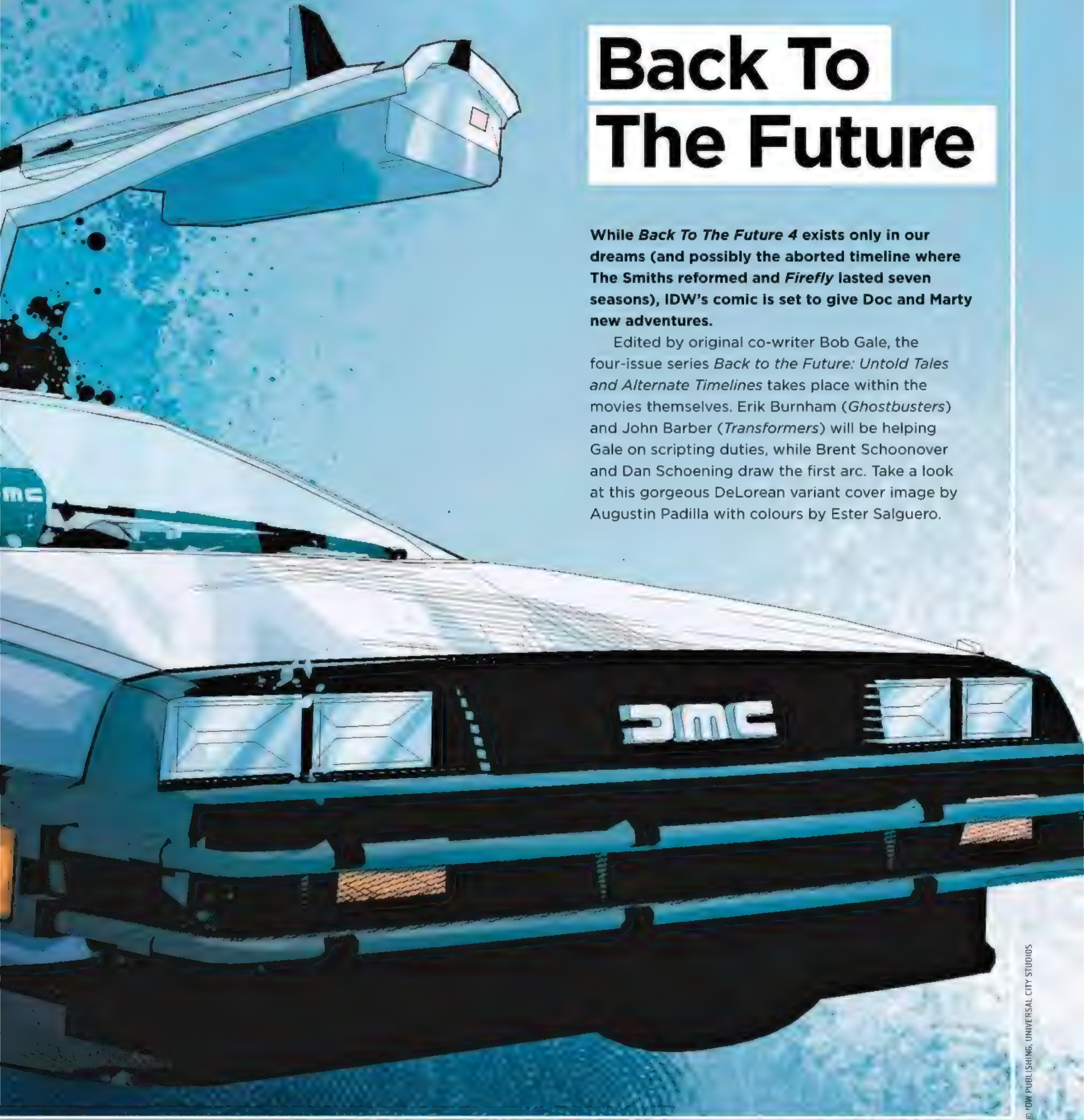
We came home dazzled by the passion, innovation and creativity so abundant at Pixelatl. My take-away from it? This is a tiny sample of what Mexican creators have to offer. The world should keep its eye on them, for there are wonders in store.



# Back To The Future

**While *Back To The Future 4* exists only in our dreams (and possibly the aborted timeline where The Smiths reformed and *Firefly* lasted seven seasons), IDW's comic is set to give Doc and Marty new adventures.**

Edited by original co-writer Bob Gale, the four-issue series *Back to the Future: Untold Tales and Alternate Timelines* takes place within the movies themselves. Erik Burnham (*Ghostbusters*) and John Barber (*Transformers*) will be helping Gale on scripting duties, while Brent Schoonover and Dan Schoening draw the first arc. Take a look at this gorgeous DeLorean variant cover image by Augustin Padilla with colours by Ester Salguero.



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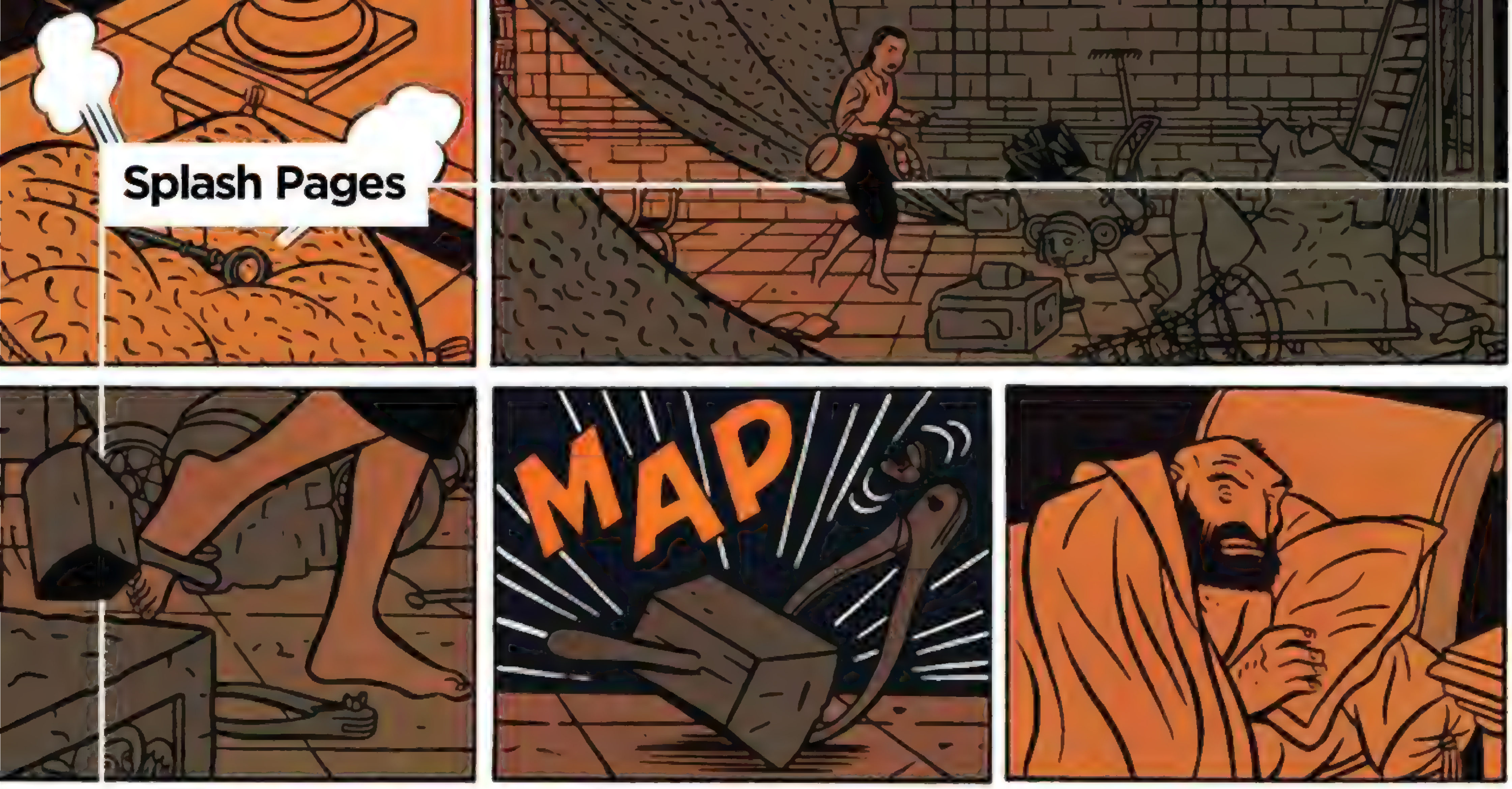
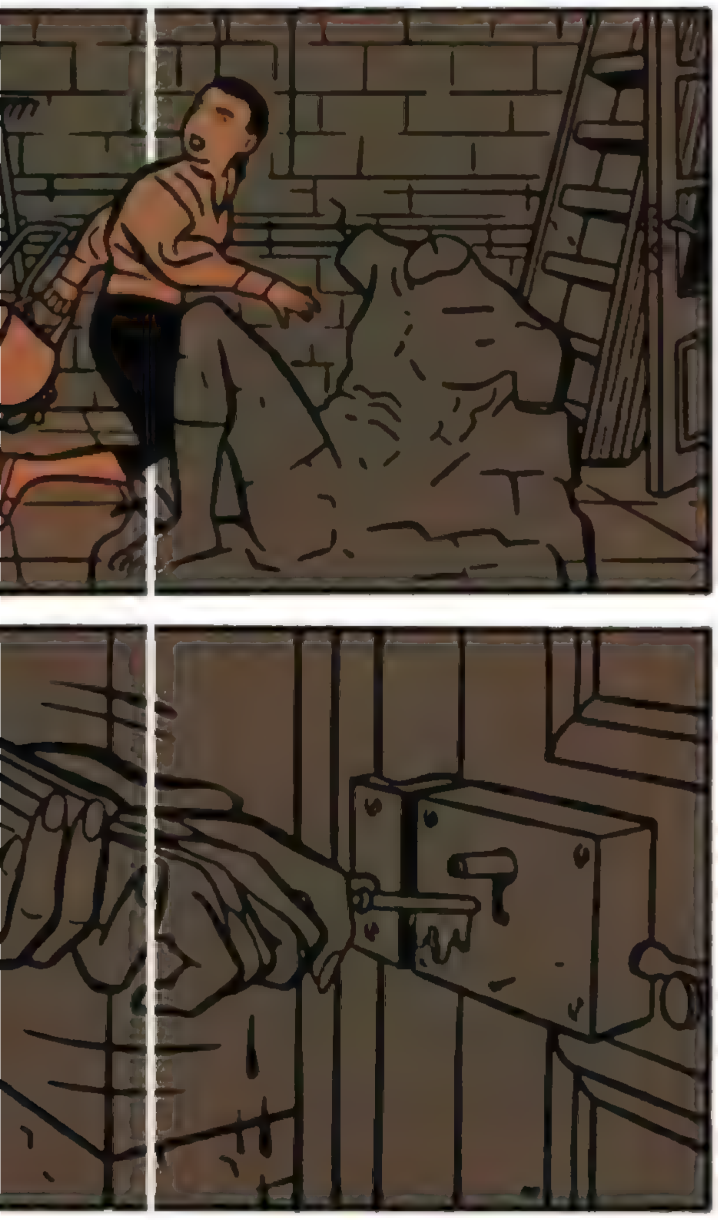


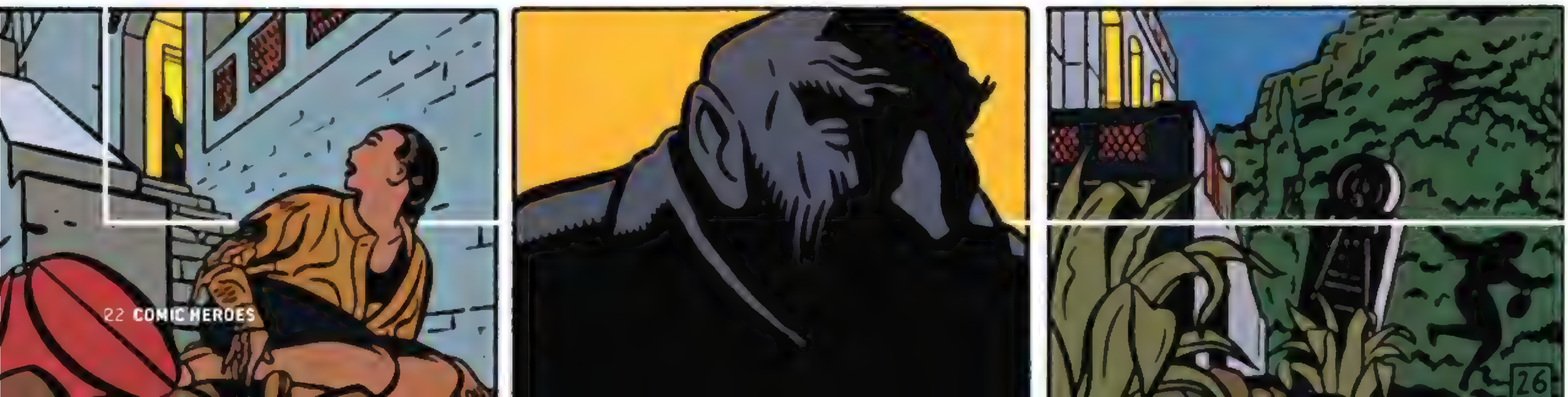


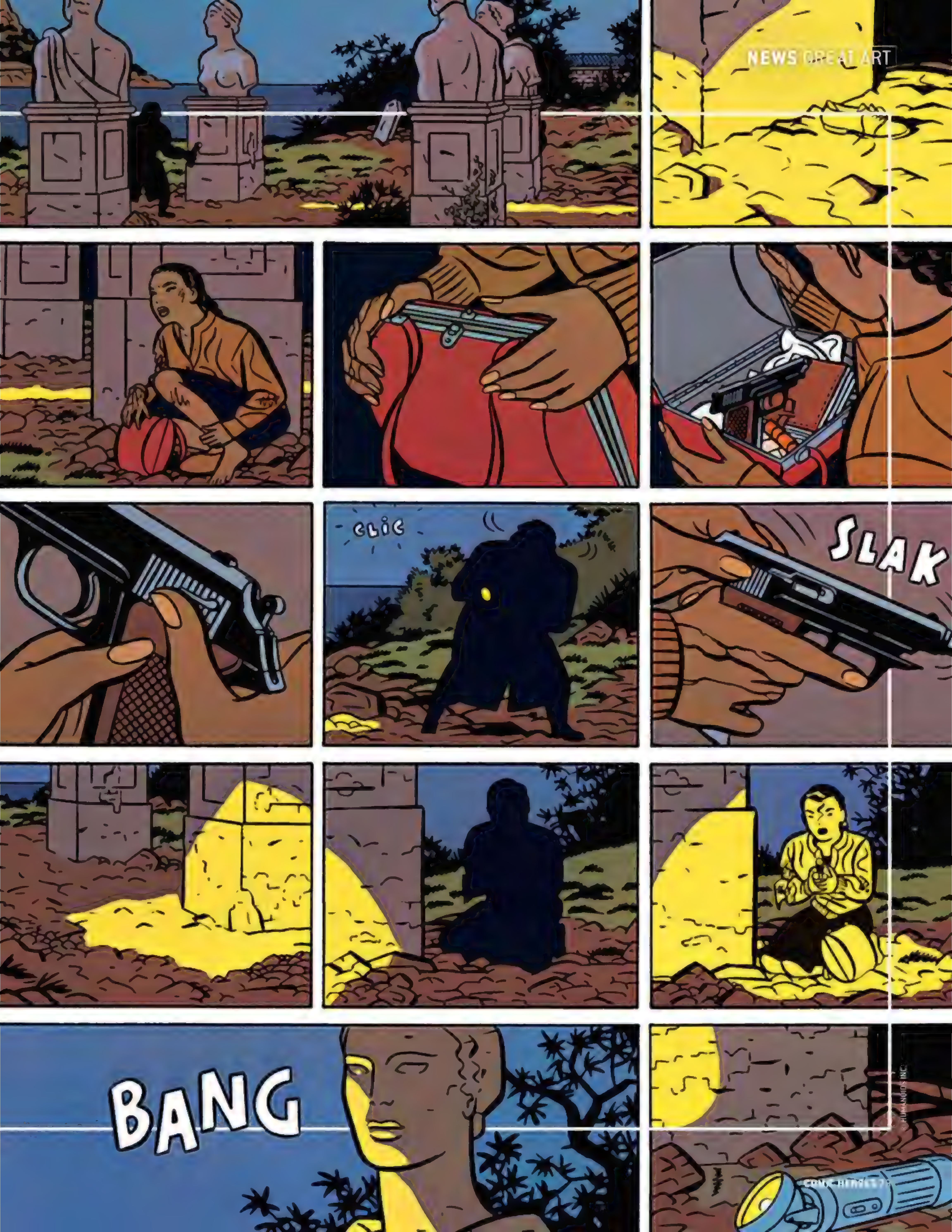
# Freddy Lombard

**In the parallel universe where great creators never die young and Joe Maneely lived to become one of the mainstays of the Marvel Age, Yves Chaland was not killed in a car accident in 1990 at the age of 33 but continued chronicling the adventures of his Tintin-alike Freddy Lombard.**

Back in our universe, Humanoids is issuing a beautiful 240-page hardcover collection of all five *Freddy Lombard* stories. Considering they were created and originally published in the 1980s, they have a curiously retro flavour in many respects – and, fair warning, modern readers may take issue with aspects of the portrayal of Africans in the second story, *The Elephant Graveyard* (dodgy even in 1984). In the afterword, Jean-Luc Fromental advocates the view that Chaland's art is evolving backwards, so to speak, towards a purer *ligne claire* style like that of Hergé at his 1950s peak. But if you come to *Freddy Lombard* with fresh eyes, you can appreciate the fluidity of Chaland's earlier, more cartoony art, which goes a long way to reconciling the two competing schools of *bandes dessinées* and has a dynamic quality akin to the best of Jaime Hernandez or Darwyn Cooke. Despite the obvious similarities to Tintin, Freddy is a much less strait-laced character and Chaland's work, even in its questionable moments, can be much more vibrant than Hergé's.

Whether you love *Tintin* or hanker for something more gutsy, this sumptuous collection is a real treat and a fitting monument to its talented creator.




CLIC
SLAK
BANG

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# SHAPERS OF WORLDS

RAPID-FIRE Q&As WITH COMIC CREATORS

# KIERON GILLEN

The *Phonogram* and *Wicked + Divine* scribe is also the writer behind the bestselling *Darth Vader* solo series from Marvel. **Rich Edwards** finds out more about taking on an icon...

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STAR WARS
DARTH VADER

**Comic Heroes: Darth Vader is arguably the most iconic screen villain of the last 50 years. Was he a daunting character to take on? How much did you have to think about it before signing up?**

**Kieron Gillen:** A lot. *Empire* was the first movie I ever saw in the cinema. Writing canon, in the lead-up to it, for my own first cinematic vision of evil... well, am I the guy for the job? I had to really consider that carefully. In the end, I realised I'd probably written more morally dubious characters than anyone else presently working for Marvel, so... well, maybe I *am* he right guy for it. I'm also Evil. That helps.

**CH: What makes Vader work as a comic book character? And what are the challenges of writing him?**

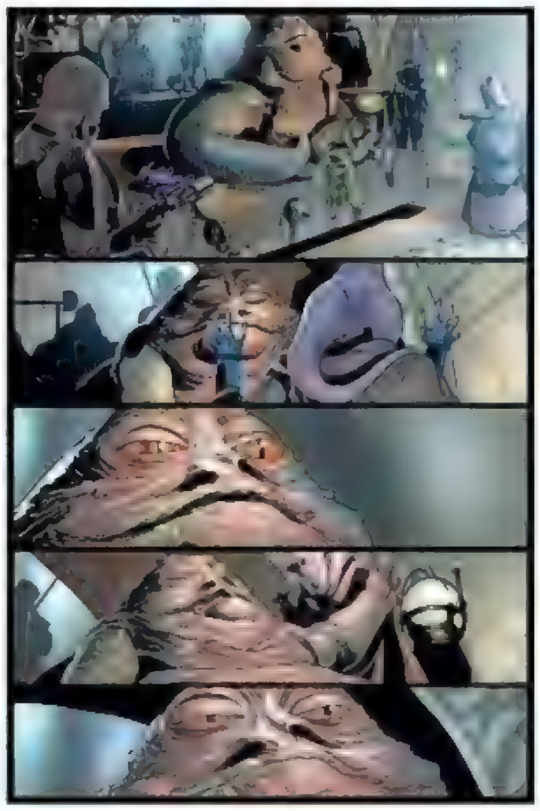
**KG:** A great visual. Never under-estimate the power of a great visual in comics. The biggest problem is that he's taciturn, gains most of his power from us being at a slight remove from him, and – trickiest of all in a still medium – is wearing a mask the whole time. So, trying to communicate an inner life while maintaining the necessary majesty is the trick. There's a lot of effort in that particular balancing act.

**CH: You've said in previous interviews that Vader finding out he has a son struck you as a key unseen moment. How much did you scour the movies for ideas for the character's evolution?**

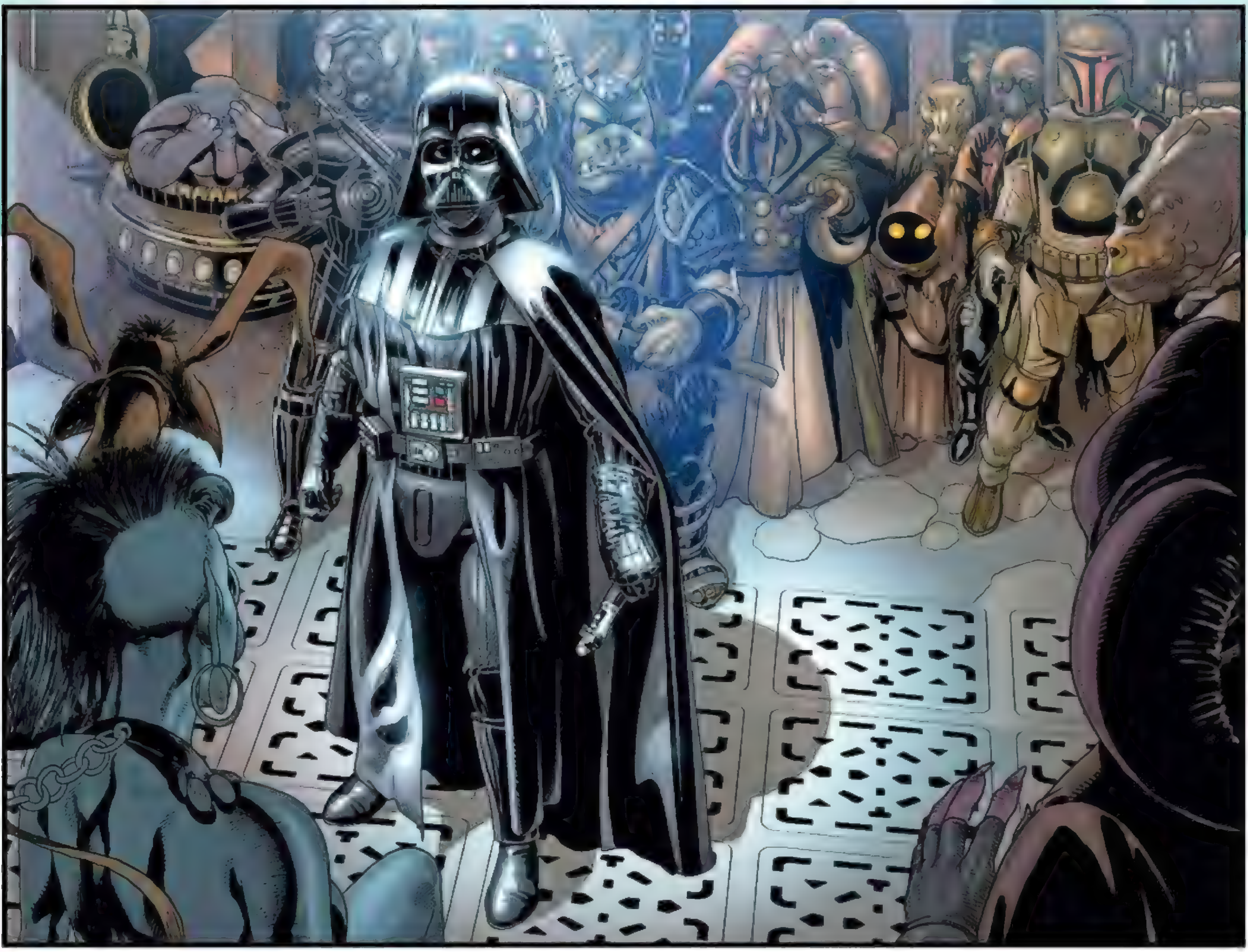
**KG:** Oh, constantly. That was the job. I sat down with a notepad and did a complete close reading of all the movies, with a pen and notepad in hand. That's covered in scrawled notes and random thoughts. It's all real deconstructionary reading-between-the-lines stuff. There's masses of things on that notepad I'll never use, but I was looking for everything interesting, especially related to Vader's arc.

The implied arc is the main one, but there's a lot more – things like Vader's briefing of the Bounty Hunters in *Empire* made me realise that Vader knew these people. He was briefing with a lot of obvious knowledge ("No disintegrations"). That implied experience on the seedier side of *Star Wars* life led to a lot of the things he gets up to.

The trick is not to overdo it. As I said, *Star Wars* is an enormous universe. Part of you wants to tie everything together and all these characters so closely, but that just becomes artificial. In *Vader Down* when Aphra [a scientist who forms an alliance with Vader] and Han meet, there's part of you wants to make them old acquaintances, but that'd just be too much.



THIS PAGE: Gillen's *Darth Vader* series is set between the end of *A New Hope* and the start of *The Empire Strikes Back*, and it's not only compelling, it's officially all canon. All of which makes it unmissable for any fan of comics or *Star Wars*



ALL IMAGES © MARVEL

> “I sat down with a notepad and did a close reading of all the movies”

**CH: You've worked with iconic characters before in your Marvel work. How does writing Vader compare to that?**
**KG:** It's an experience. I've written iconic villains before, but none as [iconic] as Vader, and none of those villains were the lead. I've always wanted to do a villain book in my career, but I never dreamed I'd get to do it with Darth Vader.

**THIS PAGE:** Gillen has said giving Vader an internal monologue would destroy his "looming, monolithic quality," but the writer has been inspired by character-driven thrillers like *I, Claudius*, *The Godfather* and *House of Cards*

**CH: Has working in the *Star Wars* universe changed your outlook?**
**KG:** It'll be better to ask me when I've finished writing *Vader*. When you're in the world and working, you're constantly doing the aforementioned deconstruction. You're dissecting it for all the potential aspects. You're trying to transform it. I'll be interested what I'm like when I'm finished, and see how much I can disengage and how much the experience has changed me. It won't go back to how it was before – I wouldn't want it to, as life is change – but I'll be interested to see how I look at the world.

# MIKE CAREY & MIKE PERKINS

They made a splash with *Doctor Faustus* and later *SpellBinders*. Now they're working together again on a haunted house story with a twist for Boom. **Joel Meadows** finds out more...

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NOW THE UNWRITTEN
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**Comic Heroes: The association between the two of you goes back a number of years, to Caliber, is that correct?**

**Mike Perkins:** Yes, *Doctor Faustus* [in 1997] was the first thing we worked on together...

**Mike Carey:** And it was already apparent then that there was some kind of a chemistry. Mike was living in Poland and I was amazed at the extent he went to [in order to] get the visual reference right for the architecture on *Faustus*, going around to medieval sites. So we've always come back to work together...

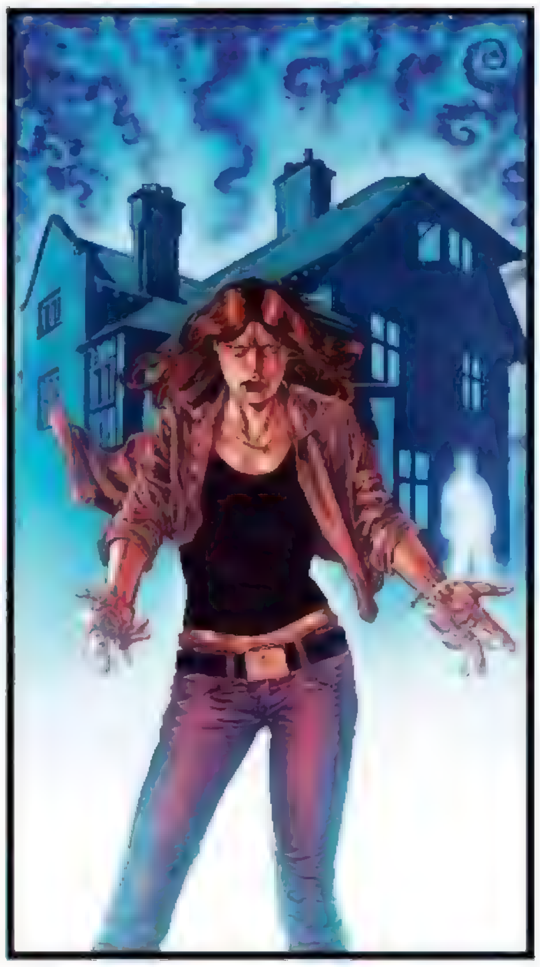
**MP:** And clicked and got on well together. I think the thing is, and I don't know if it's the same for you, but Mike forces me to be better through his scripts. That's one of the things I love about it...

**MC:** And what I love about working with Mike is that he'll just do a rough sketch of a character and I can already see how that character would talk and where they're coming from. It's like he creates this perfect stage for storytelling. So again and again we've come back into each other's orbit.

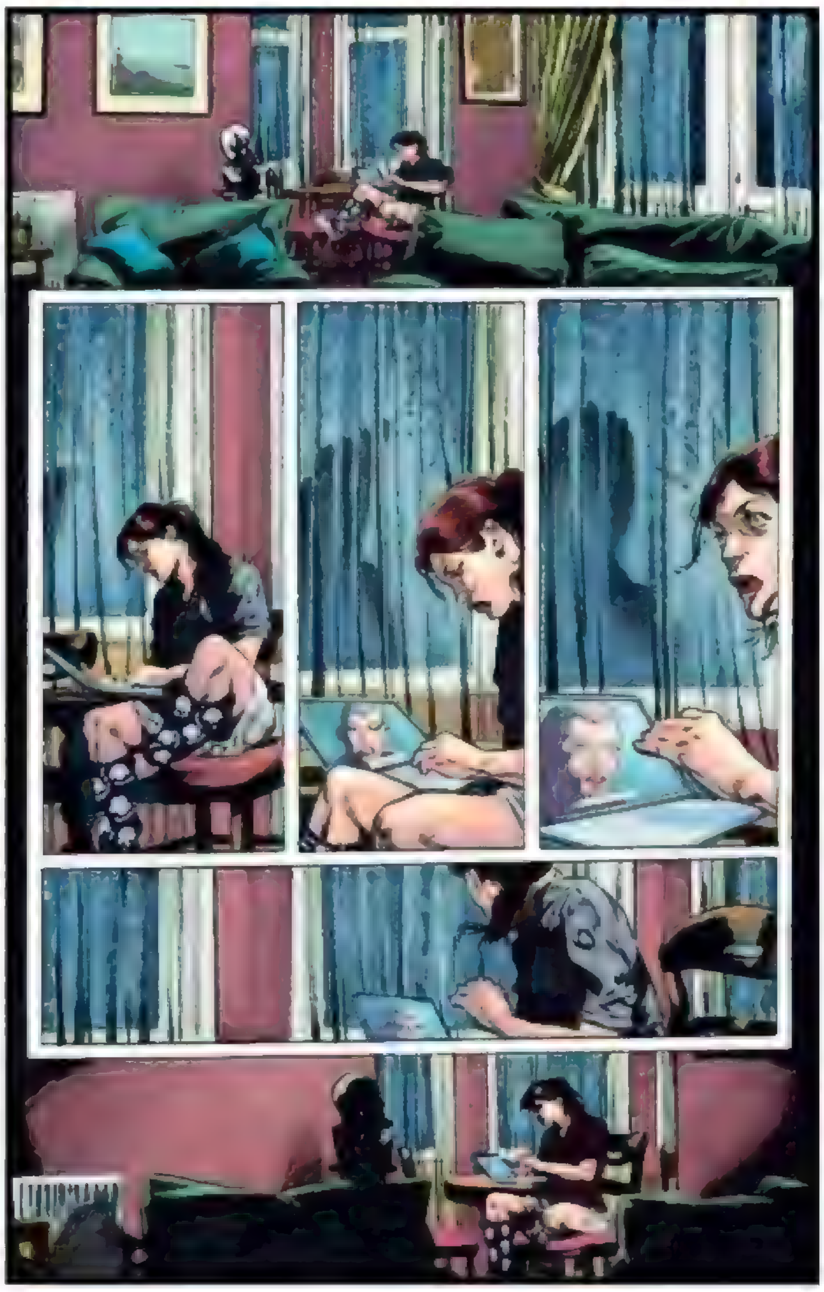
**CH: What was the starting point for *Rowans Ruin [sic]*?**

**MC:** We talked about how cool it would be to do a creator-owned book or series, and this grew out of that. There were a number of ideas that we talked about.

**MP:** I think we got together about two years ago in Stratford Upon Avon. Basically we went over a few projects – I've had different things in my mind for a while that I just haven't been able to get around to writing, [because] it's very difficult to switch from a writing brain to a drawing brain. So I just went to Mike and said: "Okay, these are my ideas, I want you to turn them into something."



**ABOVE:** "It isn't just a haunted house mystery," Mike Carey reveals. "It's as much about the two women and their psychology."



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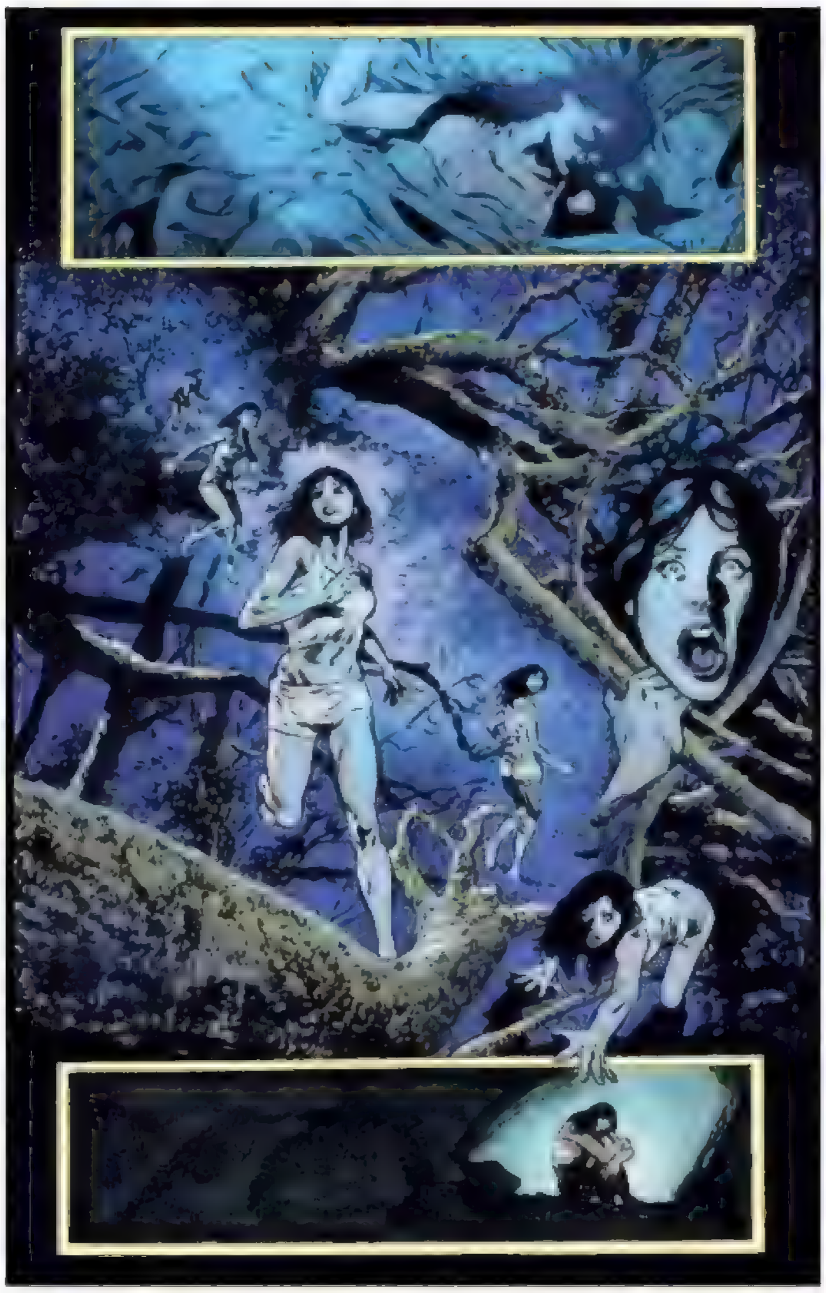
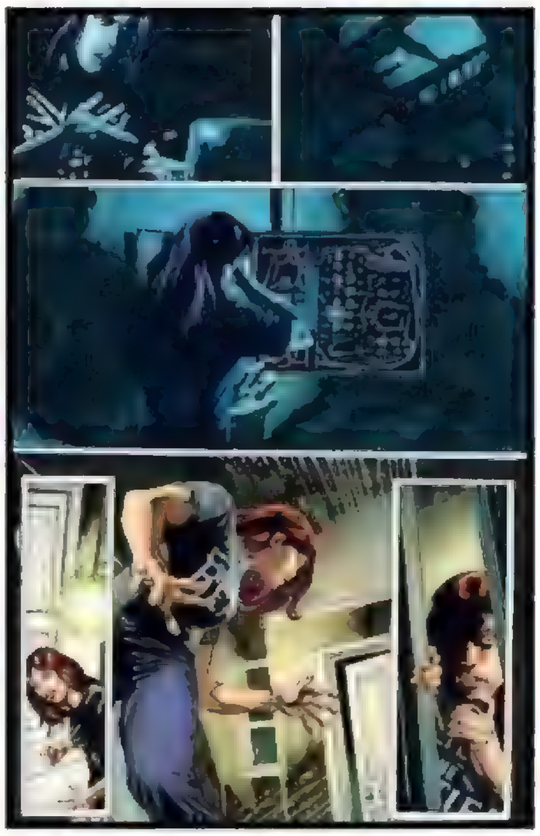


© MIKE CAREY & MIKE PERKINS



**ABOVE:** *Rowans Ruin* is a four-issue series – a great structure for horror, Mike Carey says, because "everything in horror is about setup and payoff" and having "more of a payoff in a small frame" produces that much greater an emotional impact

**CH: So what's the Hollywood one-line elevator pitch?**

**MC:** It's a house swap that goes horribly wrong.

**MP:** It's *The Holiday* meets *The Haunting of Hill House*. The house itself is a character, I would say. People talk a lot about Stephen King's books being horror books but they're really character studies. This is a character study that has a lot of horror elements that will thrill, hopefully.

**CH: So what can you say about the characters?**

**MC:** You have these two young women who meet up via a website and they do a house swap. In the case of the American woman, Katie, who is the protagonist, it's not really a house – she has a little studio flat, and she's suddenly offered the chance to swap for this gorgeous detached house in Stratford Upon Avon. But most of the action is on the UK side, so Katie comes in and she walks into this house which clearly is on a site that has been settled for a very, very long time and has a chequered history. She's effectively walking into Emily, the other woman's life, but inadequately briefed. She immediately finds there are weird things about this house. There are things in Emily's past that are hard to explain.

She has to figure Emily's life out and put it right. But she has to read from signs of where [Emily's] been and what she's done.

**CH: Is it like one of those Channel 4 house-swap programmes except with an extreme twist?**

**MP:** I think the basic idea came to me when I did pretty much the same thing, a house swap with someone in England. The experience wasn't as extreme but I was thinking: "What would happen if that house swap was just terrifying?" What would happen for this American girl to come over to England where there's this sense of history that she's overwhelmed with and the house itself plays into that sense of history?

**CH: Is it set in Stratford-upon-Avon because your family come from near there?**

**MP:** I just love Stratford Upon Avon and the house we based it on is actually in Stratford Upon Avon, so there is that sense of it. Plus I know the area well, so that also plays into it. And we can use some Shakespearean elements. You could imagine it as a Shakespeare play.

**CH: Visually you've done a lot of superhero work but in terms of its approach is it different here?**

**MP:** "No. I did want to play around with the approach. One of my biggest heroes in comics nowadays is Stuart Immonen. I love the way that he will go from project to project and change a certain aspect of his style. He's got this realistic style but he's also got this style he did on the Warren Ellis book, *Nextwave*. And it's just cartoony, so my original approach was "Maybe I can do this more restrained." But then I got to the point of doing it and I thought "My name is made by doing what I do" and so I think the fans out there who follow my work will want to see the Mike Perkins they see on those things. I love working with shadow in my stuff anyway, so it'll be full of those aspects of it.

> "Katie walks into this house and effectively into this other woman's life"

# JESSICA MARTIN

The actress and impressionist has redefined herself as a comics writer and artist. **Will Salmon** enters *Elsie Harris Picture Palace* for the main feature...

BORN FULHAM, LONDON
HIGH IT GIRL, VIVACITY
NOW ELSIE HARRIS
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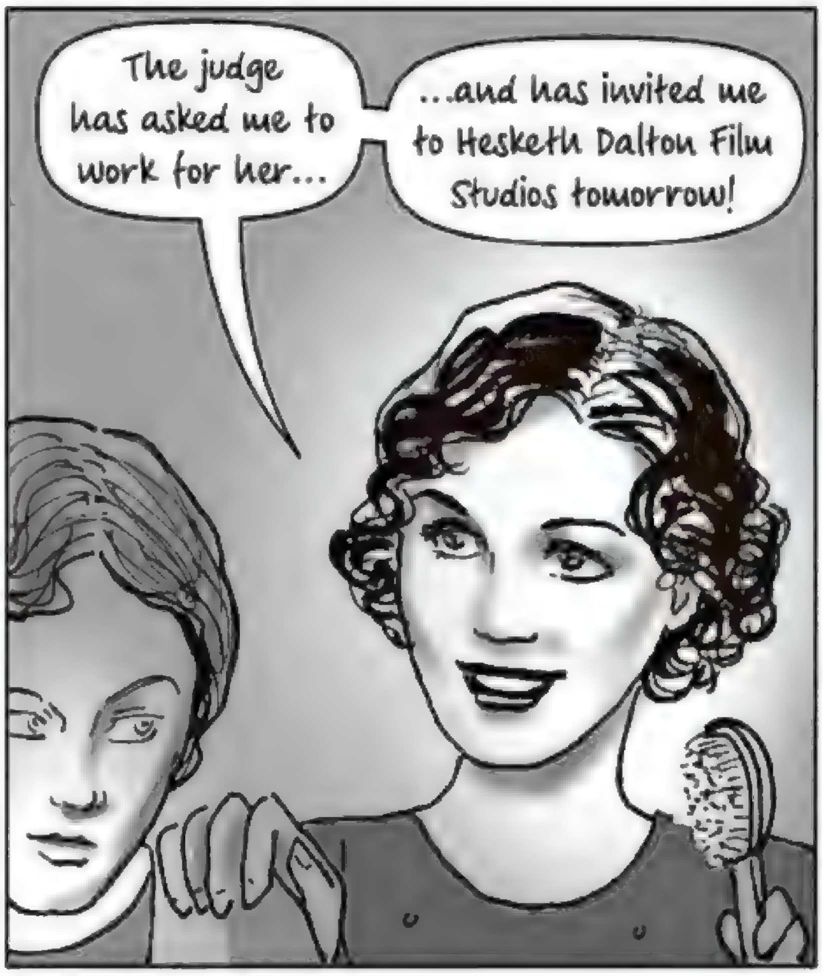
**Comic Heroes: You're perhaps best known for your acting. What drew you to creating comics?**

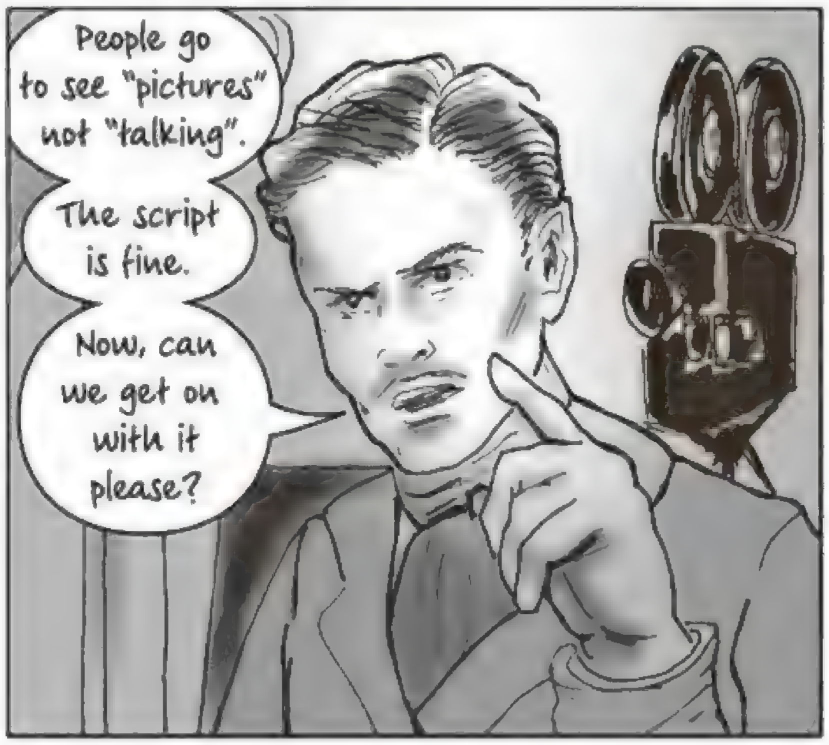
**Jessica Martin:** In my childhood, I was always a keen artist and, being a fan of classic black-and-white movies, my subject matter would invariably revolve around either recreating portraits of my favourite icons or creating fake film posters or stories featuring film stars of my own imagining. I excelled at art at school but English and Drama were the subjects I chose to study and then I followed my dream of becoming an actress. My epiphany came when I decided to take up drawing again as a hobby about four years ago. A book called *The Creative License* by Danny Gregory, advocating the practice of daily sketching of everyday surroundings and objects, got me out of my narrow spectrum of drawing pretty ladies in nice dresses and unwittingly learning the rudiments of drawing and perspective. An acting colleague, who happened to be a big comics fan, saw my drawings and said I should try doing a graphic novel.

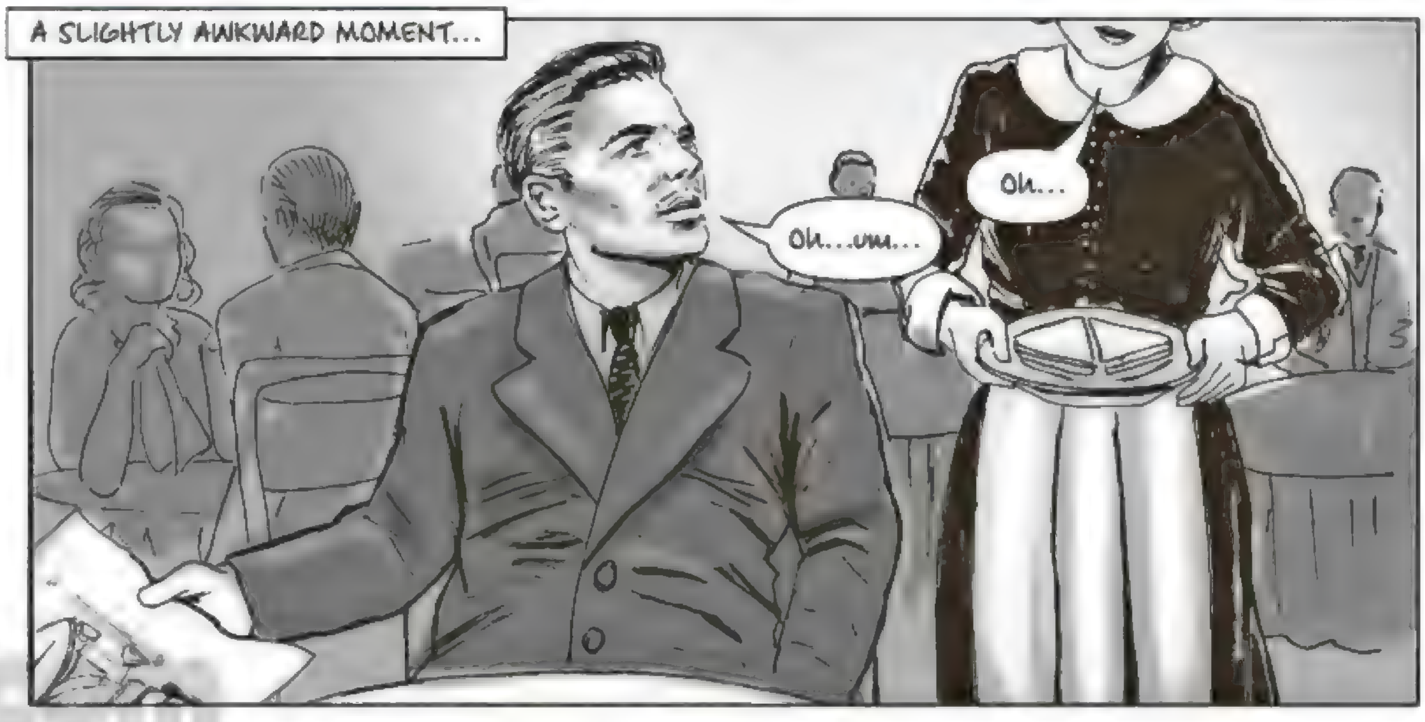
**CH: How would you describe *Elsie Harris Picture Palace*?**

**JM:** It's a coming-of-age romantic adventure set in an imagined 1930s London and Hollywood. It is a rags-to-riches showbusiness story with

**Right:** Martin may be best known for voicing the Queen in *Spitting Image*. Try hearing the voices of famous actors in her graphic novel..


The judge has asked me to work for her...
...and has invited me to Hesketh Dalton Film Studios tomorrow!


People go to see "pictures" not "talking".
The script is fine.
Now, can we get on with it please?


A SLIGHTLY AWKWARD MOMENT...
Oh...
Oh...um...

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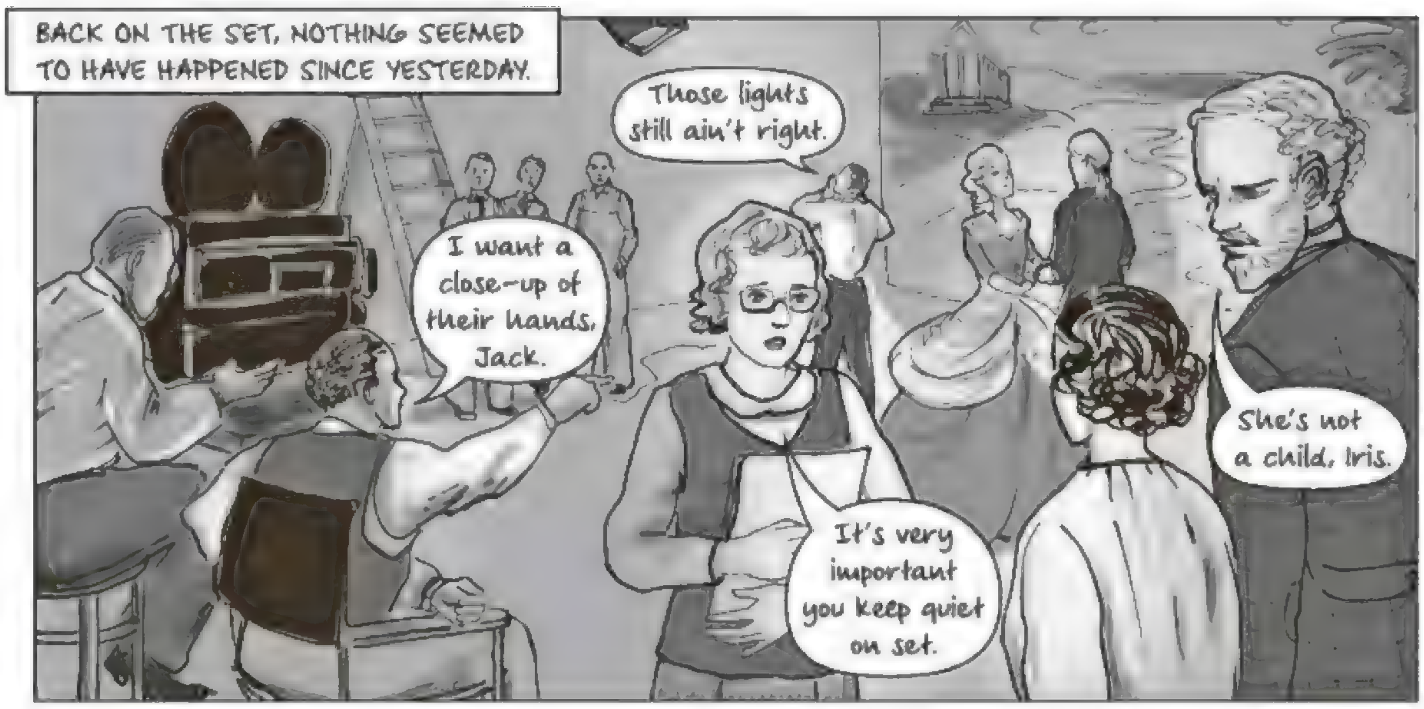

BACK ON THE SET, NOTHING SEEMED TO HAVE HAPPENED SINCE YESTERDAY.
Those lights still ain't right.
I want a close-up of their hands, Jack.
She's not a child, Iris.
It's very important you keep quiet on set.

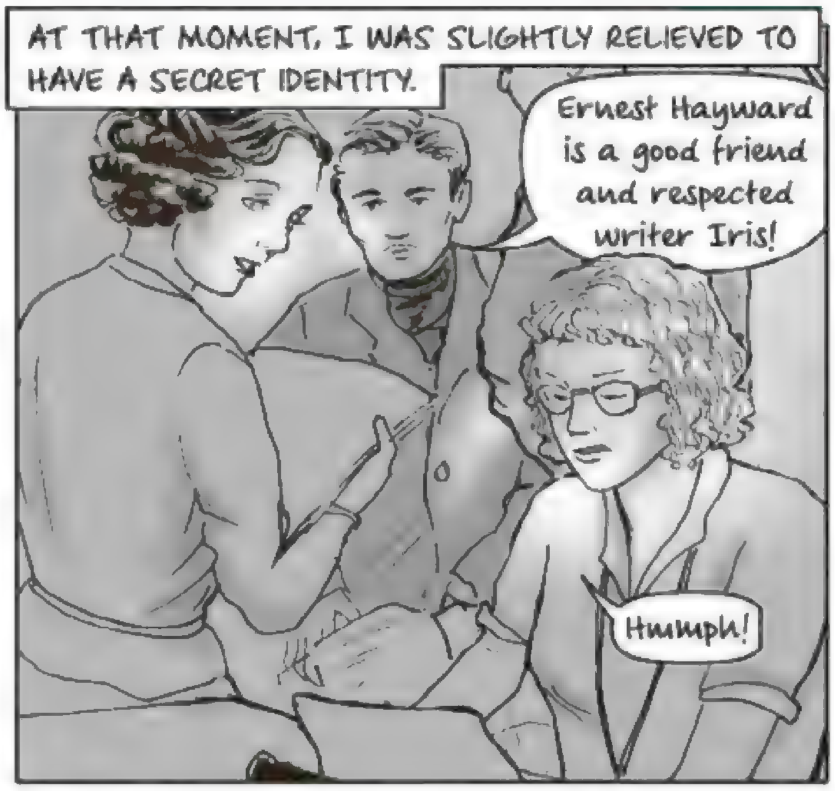
a twist, since my heroine Elsie is destined to become a star behind the scenes rather than on the silver screen. It will appeal to readers who like their protagonist to have skills and determination. If one had to do the odious cross-fertilising of film titles for a strap line, it would probably be something like "*The Artist* meets *Mad Men*".

**CH: Did you draw on your own acting experiences for inspiration?**
**JM:** My acting experiences and observations have definitely informed my "angle" on the storytelling in all my work: the incredible energy, drive of creative people, the politics of collaboration, the rocks that are hurled before the "show that must go on" are gold for any storyteller. And in my romantic way, I have convinced myself that possibly all the roads I've walked along in the arts have been preparing me for this, which is my absolute passion, writing and drawing comics!

**CH: What sort of research did you do into the period?**
**JM:** The research for this book was never-ending but a labour of love. The worst thing about it was that I would end up getting sidetracked into exploring a whole area I didn't know about, and filing it away as "something to be used for a future project". I have so many books on my shelf relating to film history, studio history, biographies and then stacks of photo images taking up space on my iPad.

**CH: What appeals to you about the 1930s setting?**
**JM:** I have a nostalgia for the glamour that existed between the two world wars. The amazing beauty of Art Deco architecture, the style and stories of film, literature and song, all seemed to pour out of a world that on some level had a sense that this kind of perfection could not last forever.

**This page:** Martin's work is evocative of both romance comics and old movies but has its own distinctive look.


AT THAT MOMENT, I WAS SLIGHTLY RELIEVED TO HAVE A SECRET IDENTITY.
Ernest Hayward is a good friend and respected writer Iris!
Humph!

**CH: Mark Buckingham has written a lovely introduction to the book. How did that come about?**
**JM:** Mark has been my mentor and friend since I first met him at the London Film and Comic Con two years ago. He said very kind things about the early portfolio pages of *Elsie* which I showed him.

**CH: How long did the book take?**
**JM:** The present version of the book took about a year and a half to complete but the concept and initial work began three years ago. I knew I wanted to write and draw this graphic novel before I'd even published a comic, so it's been a case of learning on the job. My first, self-published, work *It Girl* proved to me that there'd be an audience interested in this genre and then, when *Elsie Harris Picture Palace* was shortlisted for the Myriad Editions First Graphic Novel Prize in 2014 and Miwk Publishing then invited me to publish, it was the green light to complete the book.

**CH: There are elements of romance comics in *Elsie*. Any favourites?**
**JM:** I love the Kirby and Simon *Young Romance* collections and the Alex Toth romance comics too. I also have collections of vintage magazine illustrations which are quite often romantic. Nowadays romance seems to reside mainly in Manga. I want to bring it back!

**CH: What are you working on next?**
**JM:** I'm taking a breather whilst I perform in *Elf: The Musical* in the West End. But I'll be reading and researching. My next short comic will be noir style, featuring a Hollywood couple who deserve a full graphic novel really. I'll also be thinking of a future storyline for Elsie. She's only 19 by the end of the first book, so there's plenty of scope for future adventures!

# CHAD HARDIN

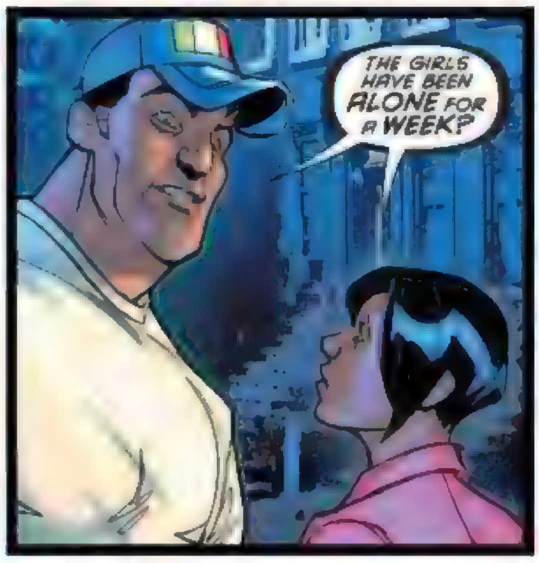
Few comic book characters have broken out in recent years quite like Harley Quinn. **Abigail Chandler** investigates the secret of the character's success with her current artist...

**BORN** LAS VEGAS, USA
**HIGH** BLUE BEETLE, DR FATE
**NOW** HARLEY QUINN
**MORE** HARDINARTSTUDIOS.BLOGSPOT.COM

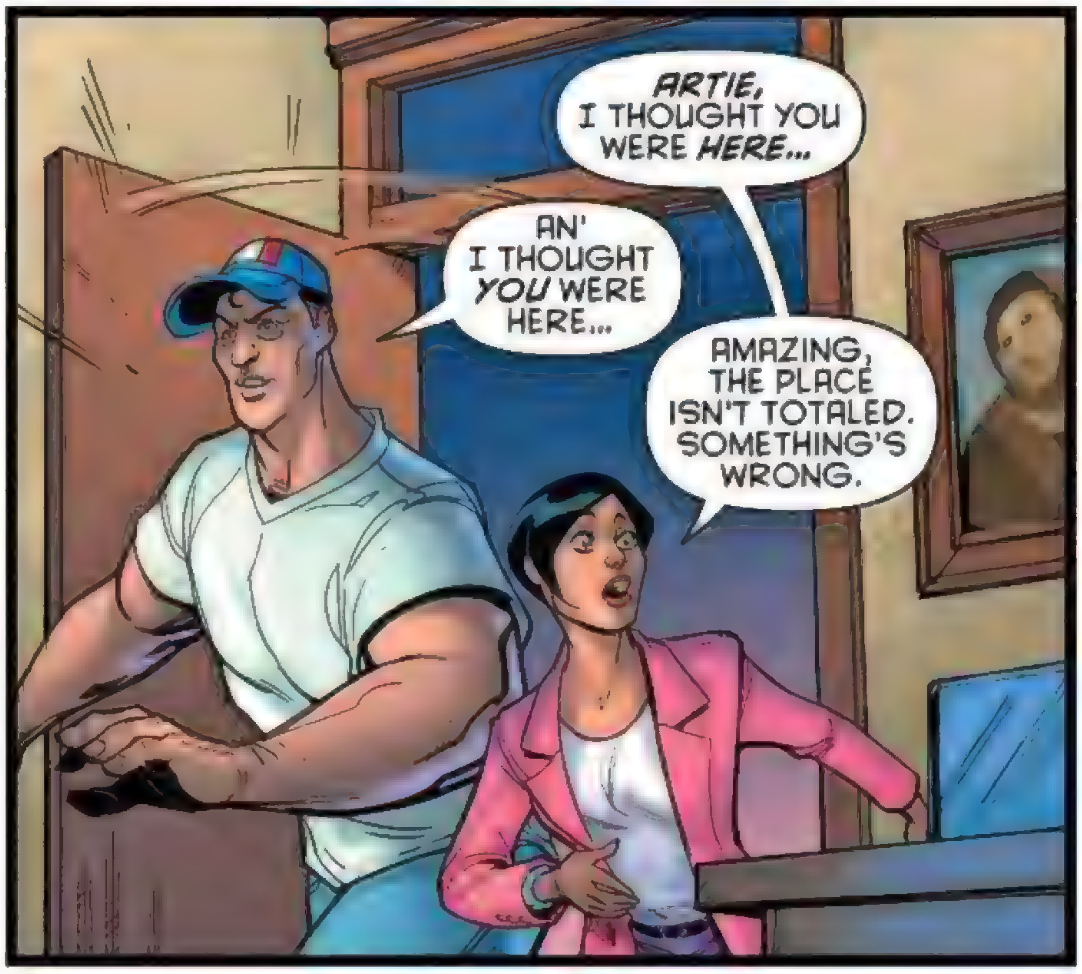
**Comic Heroes: What do you think it is about Harley that makes so many comic fans embrace her?**
**Chad Hardin:** Well essentially, Harley's just her own force of nature. She's completely lovable, completely toxic and does whatever she wants and somehow manages to get away with it. I think there's a lot of appeal to that. Especially for some girls who maybe struggle to have that in their lives, sometimes things are pushed upon them, roles and things like that. Maybe they get that wish fulfilment through a character like Harley.

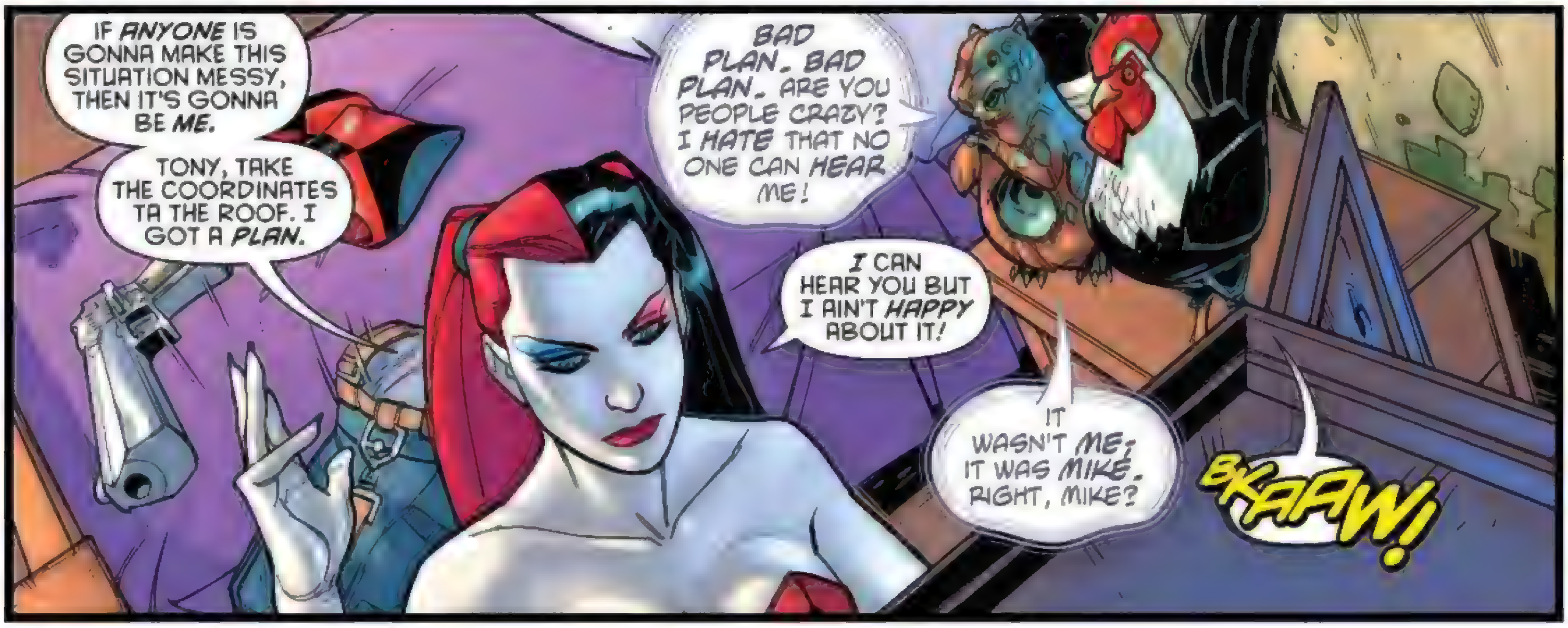
**CH: The comic has been a massive success for you all...**
**Chad:** I know! We're doing better than we ever dreamed, which is great.

**CH: You, Amanda and Jimmy keep such a fun tone to *Harley Quinn*, but there's the potential to go very dark with her, especially regarding her origin story. How do you keep the balance?**
**Chad:** If you go back to *Mad Love*, which is Paul Dini and Bruce Timm's origin story for her, originally she was there to take advantage of the Joker and the Joker flipped that on her, you know what I mean? And so really it's an abusive, toxic relationship, and like all abusive, toxic relationships it's doomed to end in failure. And I think the thing we're doing with Harley in this book is that she realises that. And she's basically getting out from underneath the Joker's shadow and being her own person. She's no longer just his sidekick doing the things that he wants her to do. She's out doing things completely autonomously and for herself. And so that's a good message too. We've all been in


THE GIRLS HAVE BEEN ALONE FOR A WEEK?

**Right:** *Harley Quinn* compellingly explores a range of relationships very different from the toxic one between Harley and the Joker..


ARTIE, I THOUGHT YOU WERE HERE...
AN' I THOUGHT YOU WERE HERE...
AMAZING, THE PLACE ISN'T TOTALED. SOMETHING'S WRONG.


IF *ANYONE* IS GONNA MAKE THIS SITUATION MESSY, THEN IT'S GONNA BE *ME.*
TONY, TAKE THE COORDINATES TA THE ROOF. I GOT A *PLAN.*
*BAD PLAN. BAD PLAN.* ARE YOU PEOPLE CRAZY? I *HATE* THAT NO ONE CAN *HEAR* ME!
*I* CAN HEAR YOU BUT I AIN'T *HAPPY* ABOUT IT!
IT WASN'T *ME*, IT WAS *MIKE*. RIGHT, MIKE?
BKAAW!

> We really wanted to play with the character from the animated series

bad relationships and we just need to learn to let go.

And here's the thing, every now and then it's fun to revisit it as well. We revisited the relationship for "Futures End" and we basically had them both trying to kill each other at the same time they're getting married, so I mean it's good in the fact that it's cartoon, we can poke fun at it, but it's also good that it's not a real life situation. You know – the anvil falling on Wile E Coyote's head.

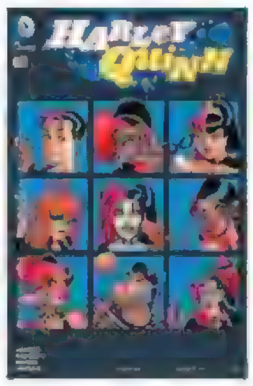
**CH: There are so many versions of Harley across different media – does that feed into your interpretation of the character, or do you keep her separate?**

**Chad:** You know, we've really just wanted to basically play with the character that Bruce and Paul created for the animated series. That's the character we're playing with. If you look at the Harley that's in *Suicide Squad*, [she's] completely different to our one. Different tone, different sensibilities. They've created this weird situation where I would never go with the character just because... well, let's face it, where Harley first appeared was the animated series. If you're talking about the core of the character, I think that's it. I was at Comic Con and I saw the *Suicide Squad* Harley – really dark. Really dark, really menacing, more evil. Whereas in the animated series, she's not that bad, she's just sort of misguided.

**CH: What do you think makes a character break out in the way Harley has?**

**Chad:** There's probably thousands of characters that anyone who was passionate about could take and bring to the forefront. And that's what it takes. I think one of the things that makes Harley successful is that Jimmy and Amanda basically said "We're going to do Harley, but we're going to do Harley our way." They really just said "We're not going to pay any attention to what people have done before, we're going to do this the way we want to do it." I think more creators need to roll the dice like that, because sometimes you get so caught up in paying homage to what's been done in the past that you become the cliché. It would be nice to see some new life brought into some of the DC characters and played with a bit more. CH

**Above:** Harley Quinn is the best-selling female character in comics, thanks in no small part to her freewheeling unpredictable style


HARLEY QUINN

WHAT WE *DO* KNOW IS THAT OTHER THAN COACH, THE *GANG A' HARLEYS* HAVE BEEN *KIDNAPPED* AN' ARE SOMEWHERE OFF THE COAST BEIN' HELD BY CAPT'N *HORATIO STRONG.*
ANY LUCK LOCATIN' THAT *BOAT,* TONY?
I HACKED INTA THE *COAST GUARD* AN' ACCORDIN' TA THEIR RADAR, ONLY *ONE SHIP* FITS THE DESCRIPTION.
IT'S *EVENING,* AN' FISHIN' BOATS LIKE HIS ARE OUT IN THE *MORNING,* SO THIS *HAS* TO BE IT.

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# ROB WILLIAMS

The *Unfollow* and *Martian Manhunter* writer tells **Will Salmon** about his recently republished *Ichabod Azrael* and ongoing work with Judge Dredd and the Martian Manhunter...

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NOW MARTIAN MANHUNTER
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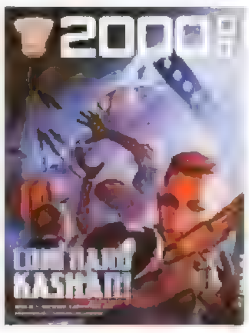
**Comic Heroes: *Ichabod Azrael* has just been published in the States. Any idea how it's been received?**
**Rob Williams:** Not really. I find, with the US market, that if you do a DC or a Marvel book then Twitter tends to give you a tonne of feedback. Everything else, you really only get a snippet here and there. It seems to have gone down well with the few reviews I've seen.

**CH: Does it feel a bit like bringing it home, given that it's a Western, the most American of genres?**
**RW:** I guess so, but *2000 AD*, where *Ichabod* was first printed, has a long history of British creators telling stories about the American experience, most famously *Judge Dredd*. Granted Dredd was co-created by John Wagner, who was born in the States, but... All the books and songs and movies that inspired *Ichabod* are Americana. *Ichabod* was largely written as a result of my interest in alt-country music. It's a story of America if not specifically about it.

**CH: What was your starting point for the series? It grows into something very strange...**
**RW:** Yes, we go through different times in series two. The supernatural is part of it from the start, but it's always a Western, really. The idea of this great mythical killer who dies and then decides to kill his way out of the afterlife and return to the living lands. And he does it for love. These are all themes that kind of grew out of my listening to songs like Gram Parsons' "The Return Of The Grievous Angel", Steve Earle's "Unrepentant", the songs of Townes Van Zandt. That's the music I was listening to at the time. And I loved a book by Daniel Woodrell called *Woe To Live On*, which is set in the US Civil War. They all kickstarted the story.

**CH: Did you have the complex, reality-breaking, time-hopping structure planned out in advance?**
**RW:** That kind of progressed as I worked through the first book. The macguffin there was pretty simple: Ichabod is murdered, goes to Purgatory, decides to come back to the living world. But is that possible? And then, if he could do that, the walls of reality would crumble, and that prompted the idea of Ichabod coming back but skipping through time. So, he's a gangster in Capone's Chicago, a B29 pilot in the Pacific, a WW1 soldier. That all opened the book up to a lot of creative options. But he had to come back home in the final book.

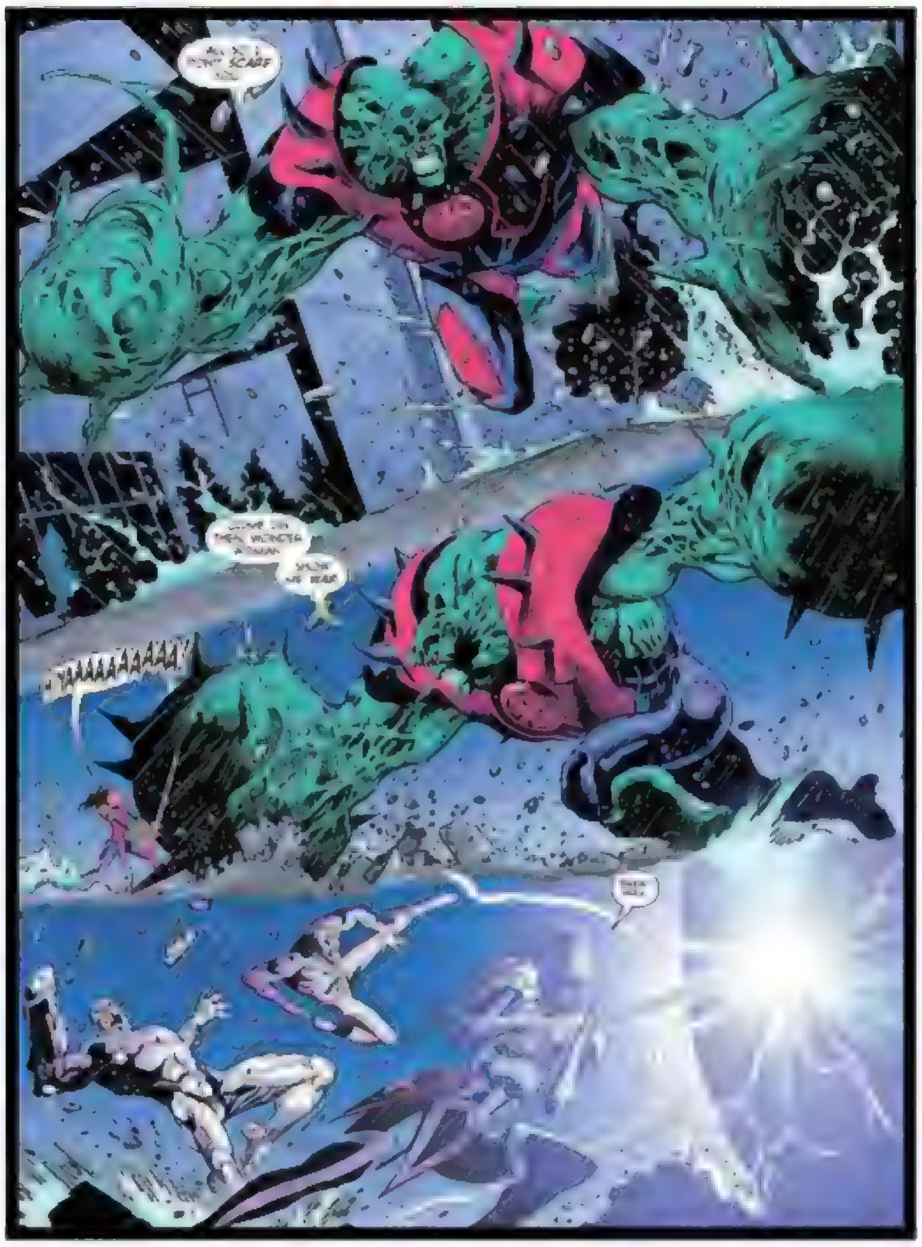


**Above:** Williams came to fame with "Asylum" in *2000 AD* and followed up with the "Low Life" series and work on *Star Wars*

**CH: He is an unrepentant killer. How do you make someone like that a sympathetic protagonist?**
**RW:** You give him someone even worse to battle. So suddenly he's the underdog. And also, the reason he comes back to the living worlds is love. And then you get into themes of redemption. Can this horrific killer be redeemed?

**CH: Speaking of Dredd, the recent "Enceladus" really felt like a high-stakes story. How much freedom do you get with the character?**
**RW:** There's a great deal of freedom within the confines of it being John Wagner's creation and John still occasionally writes the character. So, if I suggest killing one of his characters, say, it's only right that it's run past John and he has the

> “Dredd doesn't see himself as a fascist or even as the good guy. It's just the job.”


YAAAAAAAAA!

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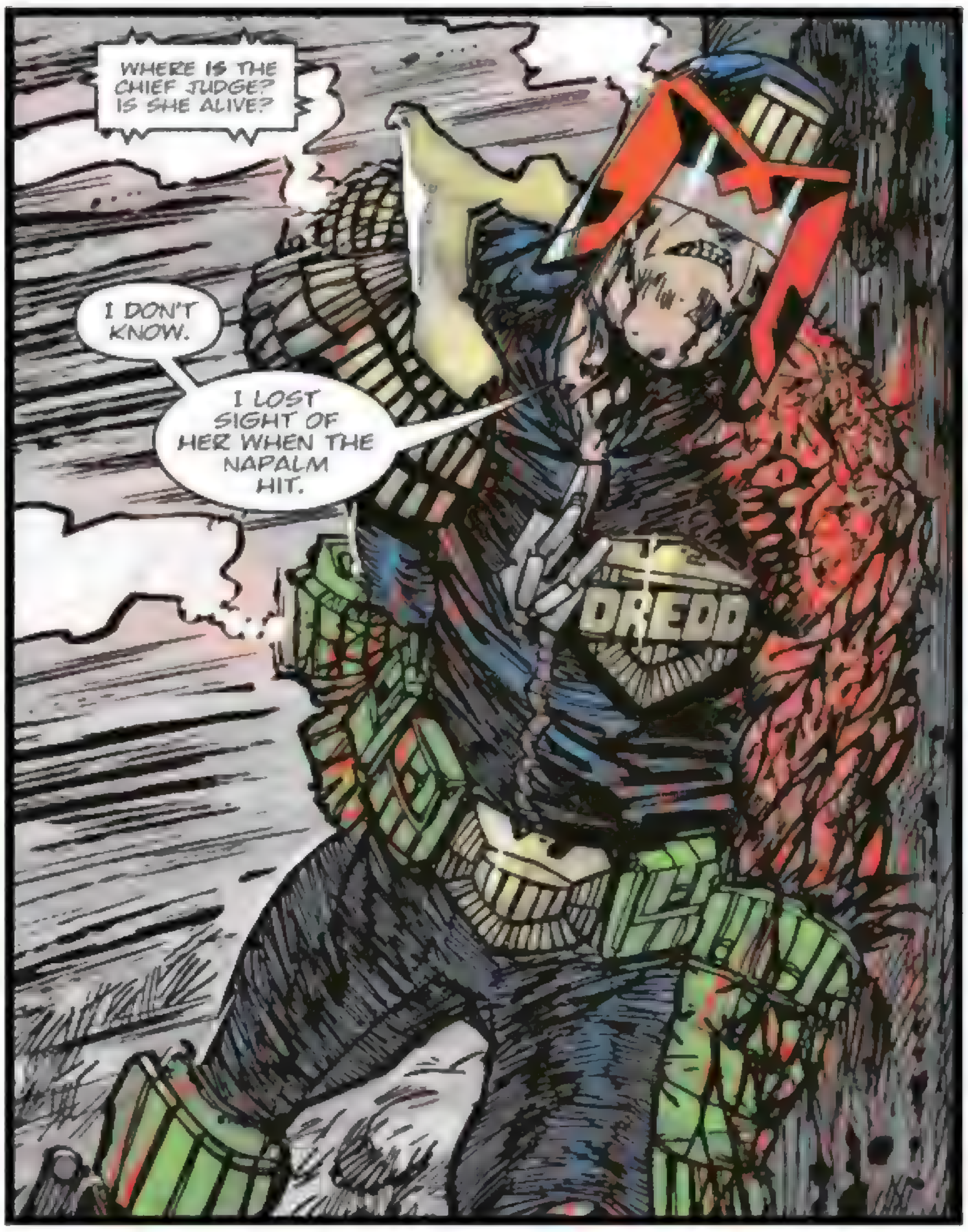

WHERE IS THE CHIEF JUDGE? IS SHE ALIVE?
I DON'T KNOW.
I LOST SIGHT OF HER WHEN THE NAPALM HIT.
DREDD

© REBELLION

opportunity to say "No, I had plans for them". But there's a balance too. Matt Smith, *2000 AD*'s editor, and I talked at the start of the "Titan"/"Enceladus" story, and I said that unless there's real dramatic stakes, unless the status quo changes as a result of the story, it all means nothing. And Matt agrees. As a writer, you have to push the world forward. We've definitely done that with "Titan" and "Enceladus".

**CH: Where do you see Dredd on the hero/villain axis now? Is every positive action he makes tainted by the fact that he is a fascist?**

RW: He doesn't see himself as a fascist. He's upholding the law, protecting the citizens, often from themselves. I'm not even sure he sees himself as the good guy – it's just the job. The fact that he is a fascist is something that, I think, the strip needs to confront again in the near future.

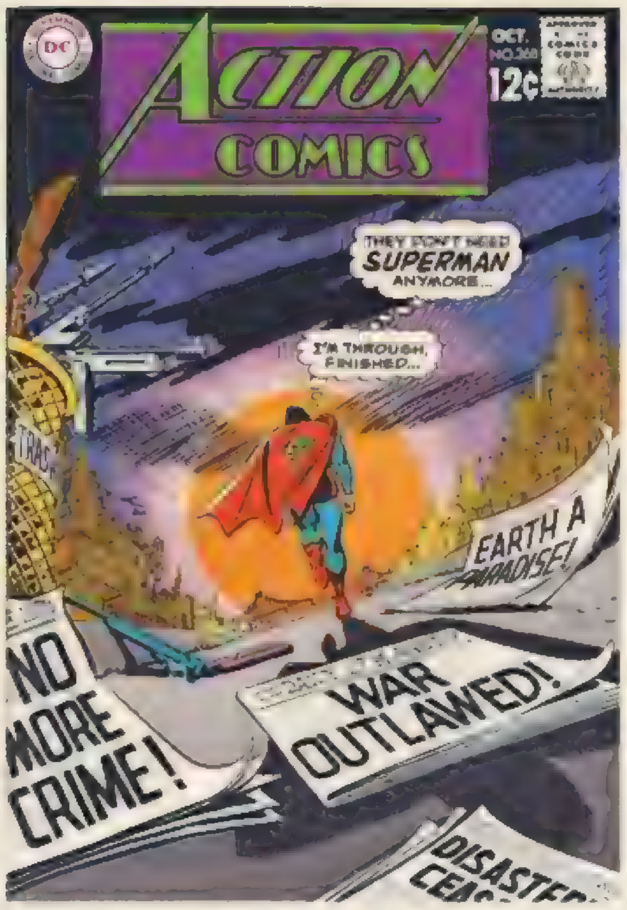
**CH: Your *Martian Manhunter* is taking the character in a very different direction from the New 52. Were you unhappy with J'onn J'onzz's plight in recent years?**

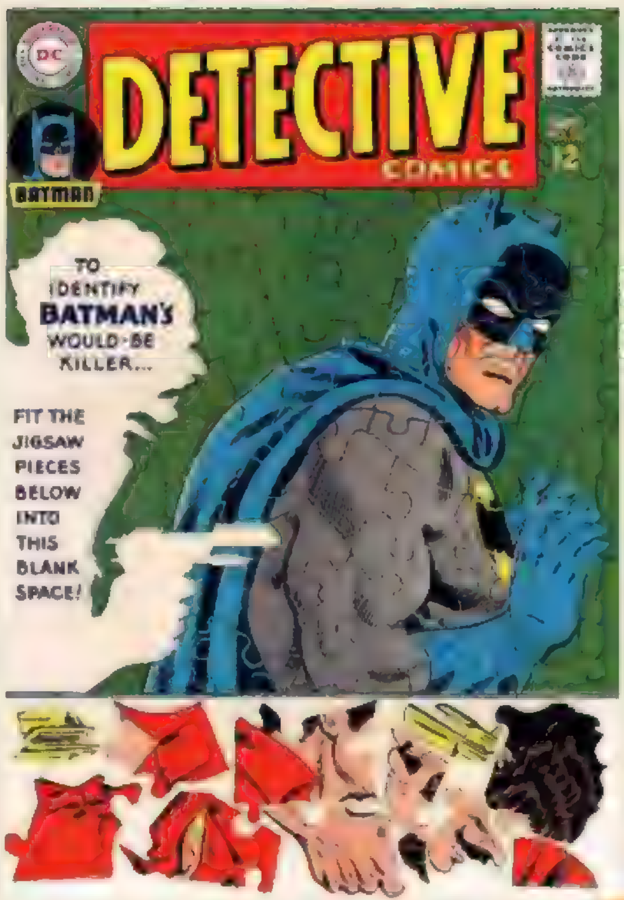
RW: No, I simply pitched what I thought was a fun, fresh take on the character. DC wanted to make him more three-dimensional and so I thought the best way to do that would be to split him into these new, very disparate characters. He's not just a shape shifter. He's very malleable, you know. And the idea that he can "just" be one alter-ego is very human. I wanted a sense that he is truly alien. That he doesn't think the way that we do. And his different sides having their own personalities makes for some dramatic internal conflict as well as the external threat of this covert Martian invasion.

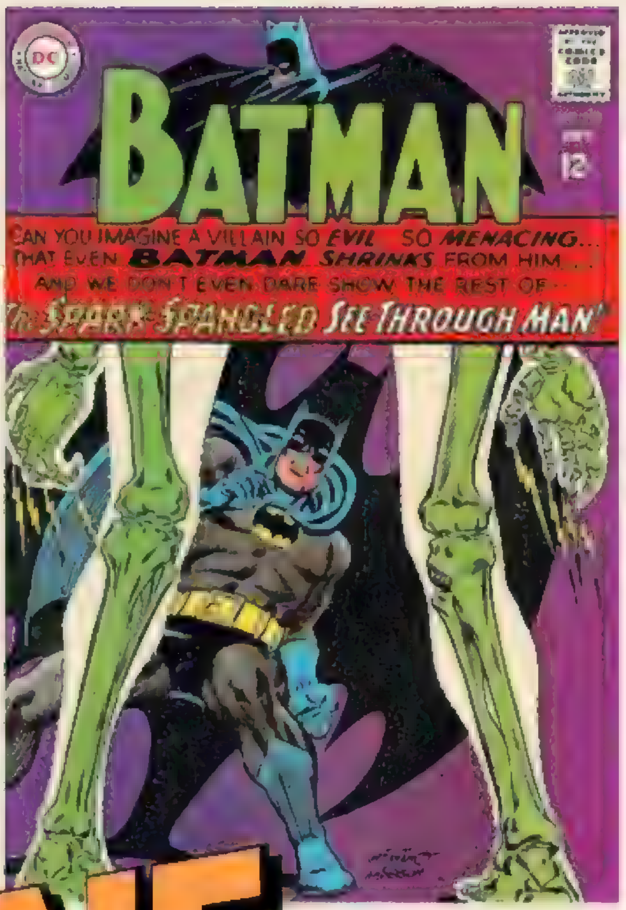
**Above:** Williams is currently writing *Judge Dredd* in *2000 AD*, *Doctor Who: The Eleventh Doctor* and *Martian Manhunter*

**CH: How do you make a superhero death feel like it has some genuine consequences?**

RW: You put the character's soul at risk. Superfolk die and return to life all the time. So, as you say, it's tough to make such an event feel like it resonates. But a wise bit of writing advice is that it's not enough to put a character's life at risk, you have to put their soul at risk. If it truly matters to them, it'll matter to the readers. CH


DC
ACTION COMICS
OCT. NO. 368
12¢
THEY DON'T NEED SUPERMAN ANYMORE...
I'M THROUGH, FINISHED...
EARTH A PARADISE!
NO MORE CRIME!
WAR OUTLAWED!
DISASTER CEAS


DC
DETECTIVE COMICS
BATMAN
12¢
TO IDENTIFY BATMAN'S WOULD-BE KILLER...
FIT THE JIGSAW PIECES BELOW INTO THIS BLANK SPACE!


DC
BATMAN
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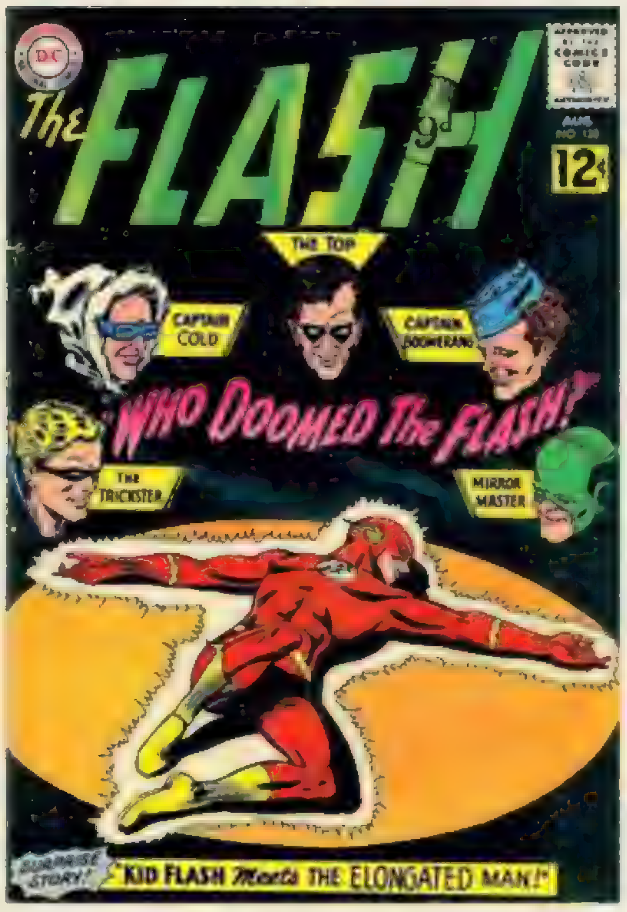
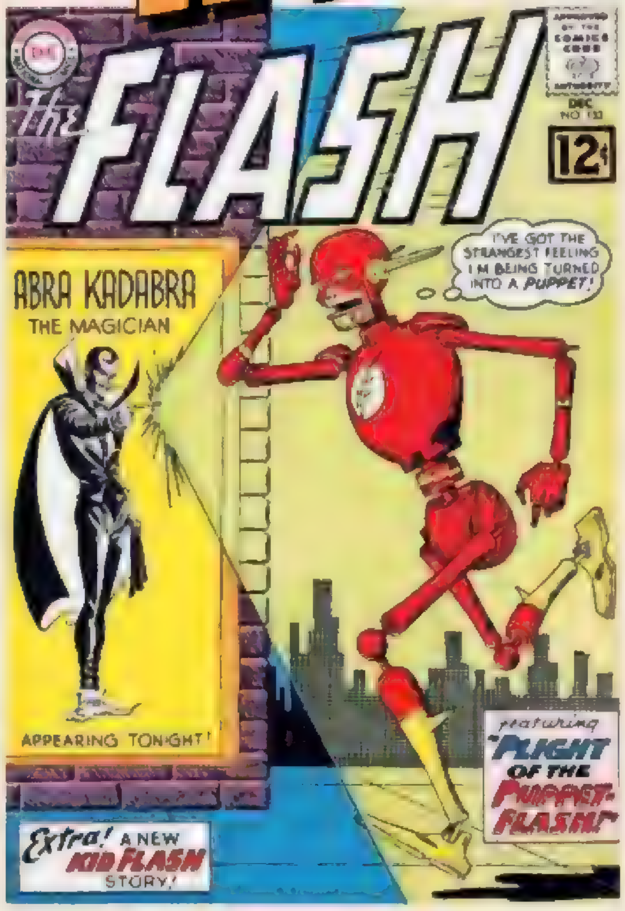
CAN YOU IMAGINE A VILLAIN SO EVIL... SO MENACING... THAT EVEN BATMAN SHRINKS FROM HIM... AND WE DON'T EVEN DARE SHOW THE REST OF...
The SPARK-SPANGLED SEE-THROUGH MAN!

# Cover Stars

# CARMINE INFANTINO


DC
The FLASH
12¢
THE TOP
CAPTAIN COLD
CAPTAIN BOOMERANG
"WHO DOOMED The FLASH?"
THE TRICKSTER
MIRROR MASTER
SURPRISE STORY!
"KID FLASH Meets THE ELONGATED MAN!"


DC
The FLASH
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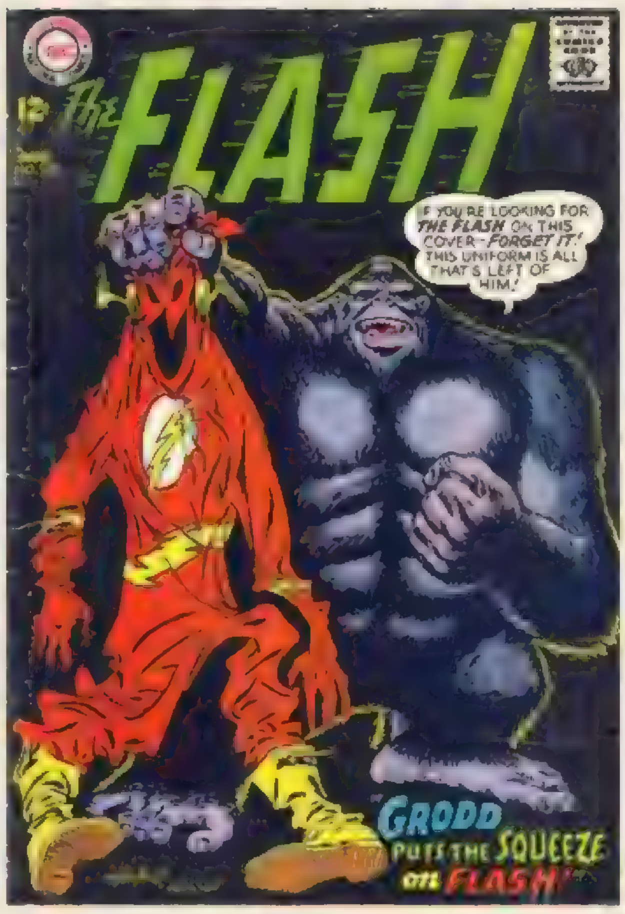
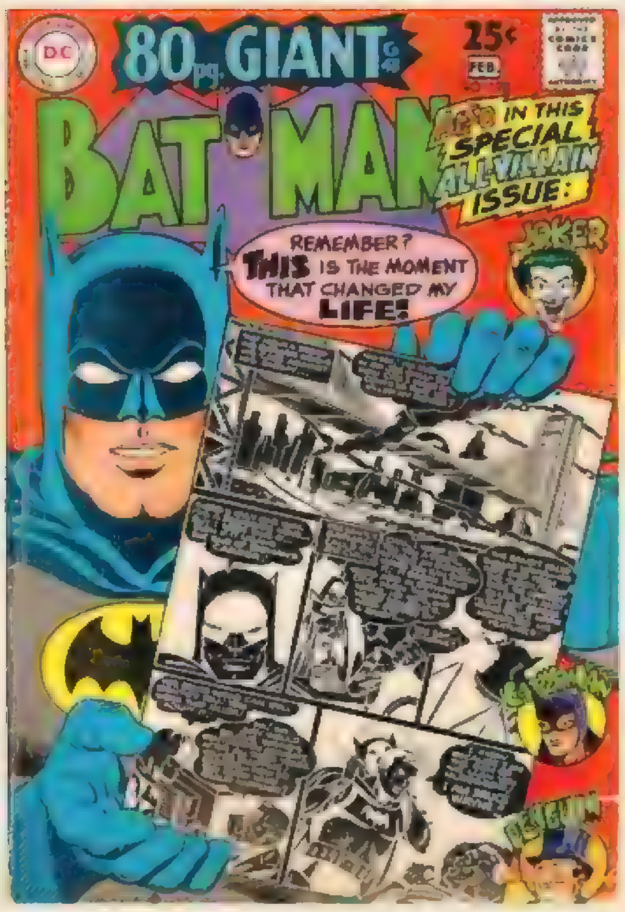
ABRA KADABRA THE MAGICIAN
APPEARING TONIGHT!
I'VE GOT THE STRANGEST FEELING I'M BEING TURNED INTO A PUPPET!
featuring "PLIGHT OF THE PUPPET-FLASH!"
Extra! A NEW KID FLASH STORY!


DC
12¢
The FLASH
IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR THE FLASH ON THIS COVER--FORGET IT! THIS UNIFORM IS ALL THAT'S LEFT OF HIM!
GRODD PUTS THE SQUEEZE ON FLASH!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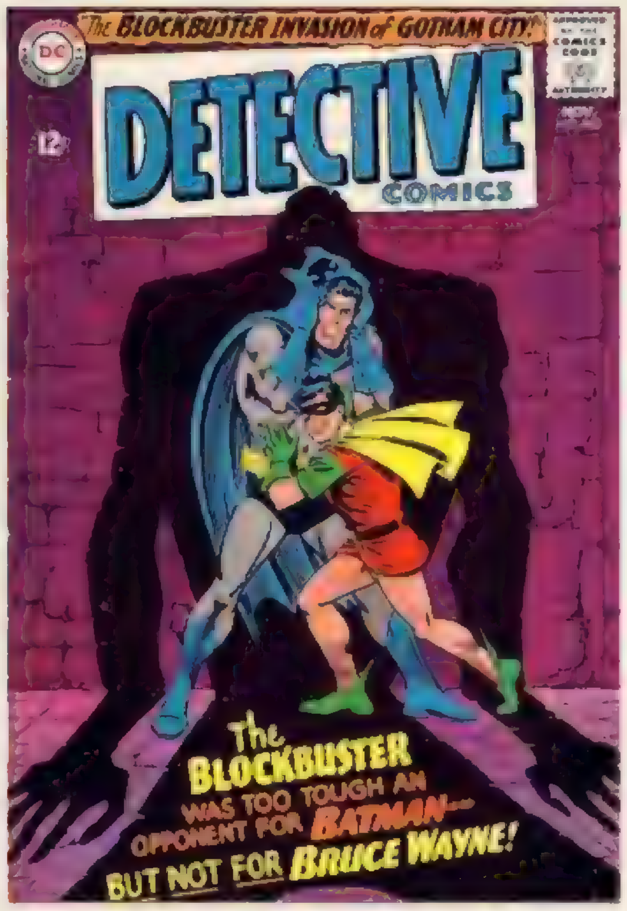
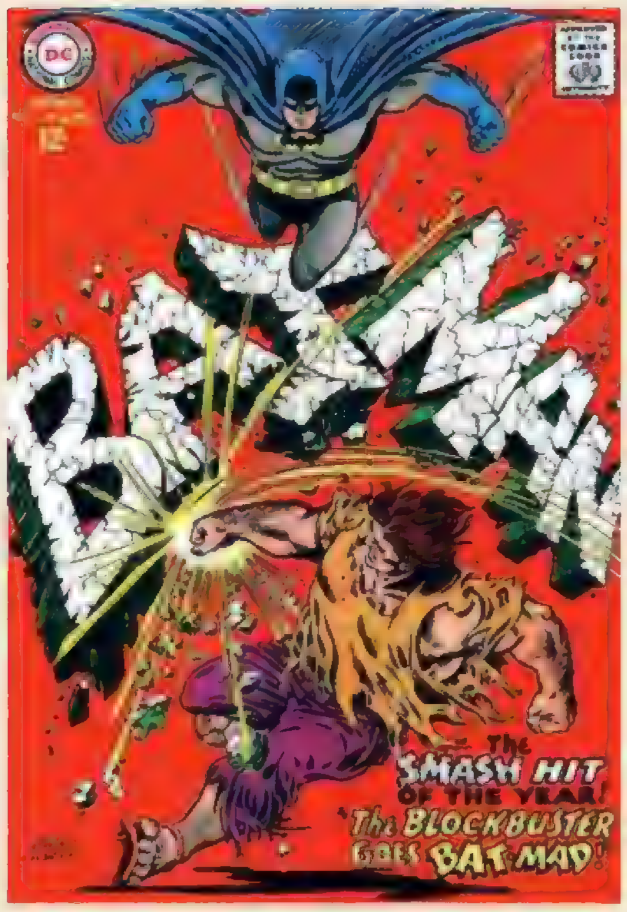
80 pg. GIANT
25¢
BATMAN
IN THIS SPECIAL ALL-VILLAIN ISSUE:
REMEMBER? THIS IS THE MOMENT THAT CHANGED MY LIFE!
JOKER
PENGUIN


The BLOCKBUSTER INVASION of GOTHAM CITY!
DC
12¢
DETECTIVE COMICS
The BLOCKBUSTER WAS TOO TOUGH AN OPPONENT FOR BATMAN— BUT NOT FOR BRUCE WAYNE!

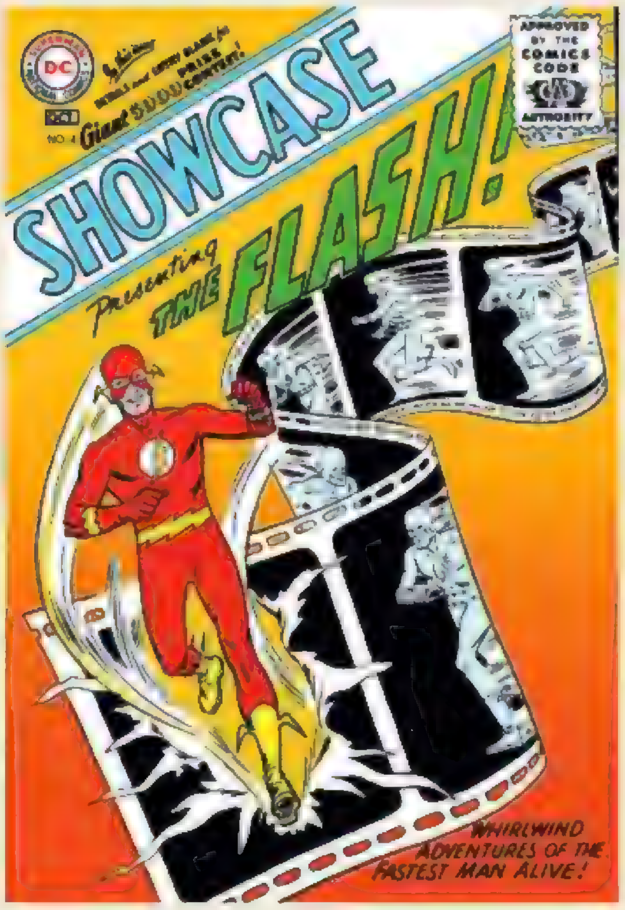

DC
12¢
BATMAN
SMASH HIT OF THE YEAR! The BLOCKBUSTER GOES BAT-MAD!

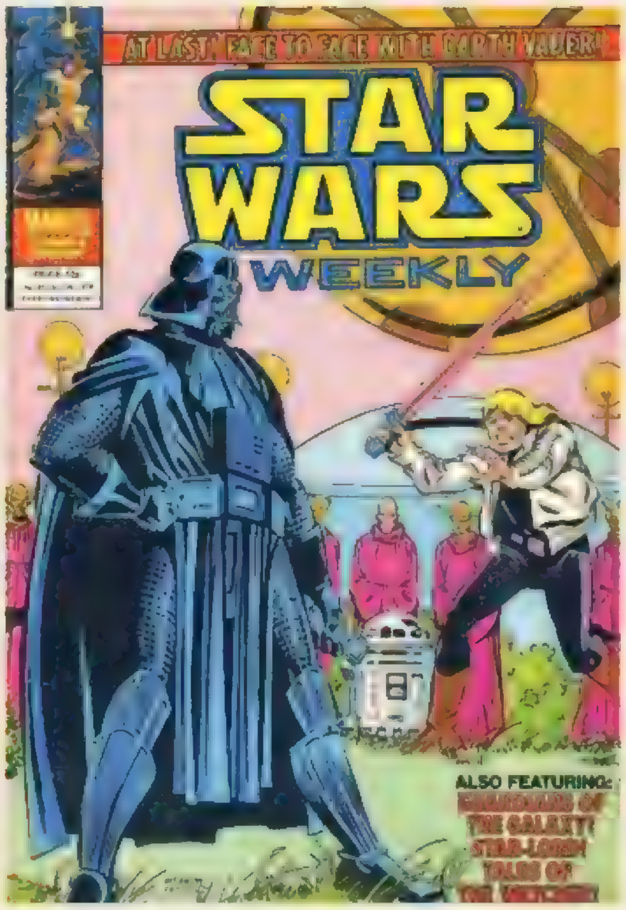
**Few names define the Silver Age of comics more than Carmine Infantino.** After studying at Brooklyn's School of Industrial Art, he cut his teeth at Harry Chesler's studio in Manhattan. Then he worked for Joe Simon at Timely Comics, starting with *Jack Frost* in *USA Comics* #3 in January 1942.

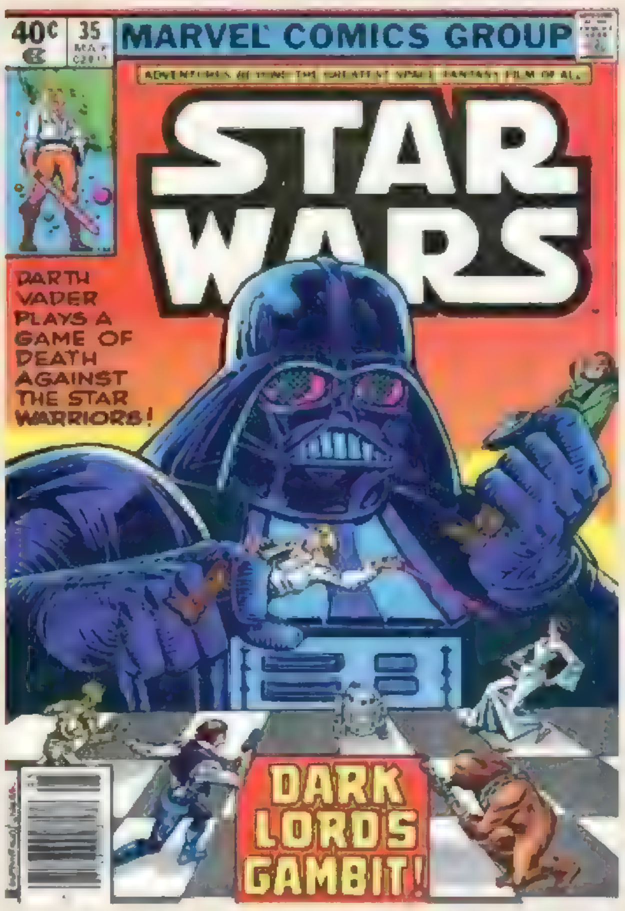
Infantino began his relationship with The Flash in 1947's "The Secret City" in *All-Flash* #31. In 1956 he would reinvent the character, designing the iconic red and yellow costume.

In the early '60s Stan Lee attempted to lure Infantino over to Marvel, offering him an (at the time) astonishing $22,000. In response, DC promoted him to Art Director. He would later work for Marvel, however, his long run on *Star Wars* being especially notable. He also organised the crossover that saw Superman and Spider-Man share a comic for the very first time.

> "IN 1956 HE WOULD REINVENT THE FLASH WITH A RED AND YELLOW COSTUME"


DC
SHOWCASE
Presenting THE FLASH!
WHIRLWIND ADVENTURES OF THE FASTEST MAN ALIVE!

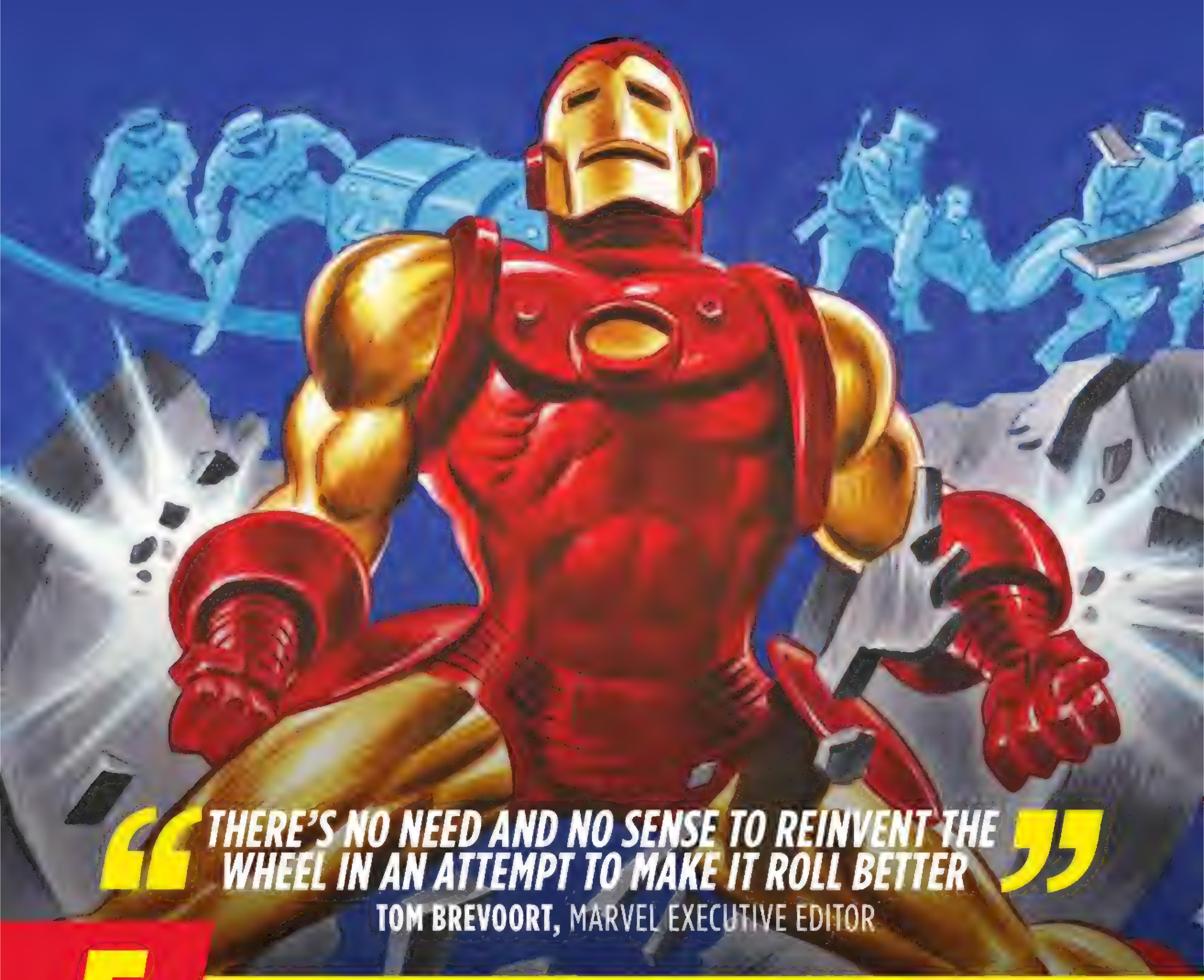

AT LAST! FACE TO FACE WITH DARTH VADER!
STAR WARS WEEKLY
ALSO FEATURING:


40¢
35
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
STAR WARS
DARTH VADER PLAYS A GAME OF DEATH AGAINST THE STAR WARRIORS!
DARK LORD'S GAMBIT!

# A UNIVERSE REBORN

DON'T CALL IT A REBOOT... **STEPHEN JEWELL** GOES BEHIND THE SCENES ON THE BIGGEST SUPERHERO EVENT OF THE YEAR, **ALL-NEW, ALL-DIFFERENT MARVEL...**

Storemags



**Above:** Bruce Timm's variant cover for *Invincible Iron Man #1* pays homage to Gene Colan's classic cover for Shellhead's first solo book in 1968. Makes a change from riffing on Jack Kirby, anyway!

> “THERE'S NO NEED AND NO SENSE TO REINVENT THE WHEEL IN AN ATTEMPT TO MAKE IT ROLL BETTER”
>
> **TOM BREVOORT,** MARVEL EXECUTIVE EDITOR

**Following close in the wake of this summer's cataclysmic *Secret Wars* crossover event, All-New, All-Different Marvel – the company's line-wide superhero refresh – has been touted in some quarters as a radical New-52-style reboot.** But while DC controversially wrote off decades of continuity when it relaunched its entire line in 2011, Marvel Executive Editor Tom Brevoort insists that the House of Ideas is adopting a more organic approach, describing it as another "periodic refresh of our publishing line" that follows on seamlessly from 2013's Marvel NOW! initiative.

"It would be a different story if things hadn't been working, but on the contrary, things seem to have been going very well for a number of years now," Brevoort tells us. "The most any of the Marvel characters has needed is the occasional nip and tuck. Plus, there's a value in that history, even if we don't obsessively refer to it all the time."

With the likes of Doctor Strange, Scarlet Witch and The Vision all being granted their own titles in the next few months, this "nip and tuck" appears to be designed to align Marvel's comic book line more closely with its cinematic equivalent. But while it might seem like a natural move to capitalise on the box office-record breaking success of films like *Avengers, Iron Man* and *Captain America*, Brevoort maintains that Marvel's comic book output will very much continue to pursue its own distinctive path. "While our comics and our films do feed off of one another in a general sense, we're typically more focused on just doing our own thing, which is

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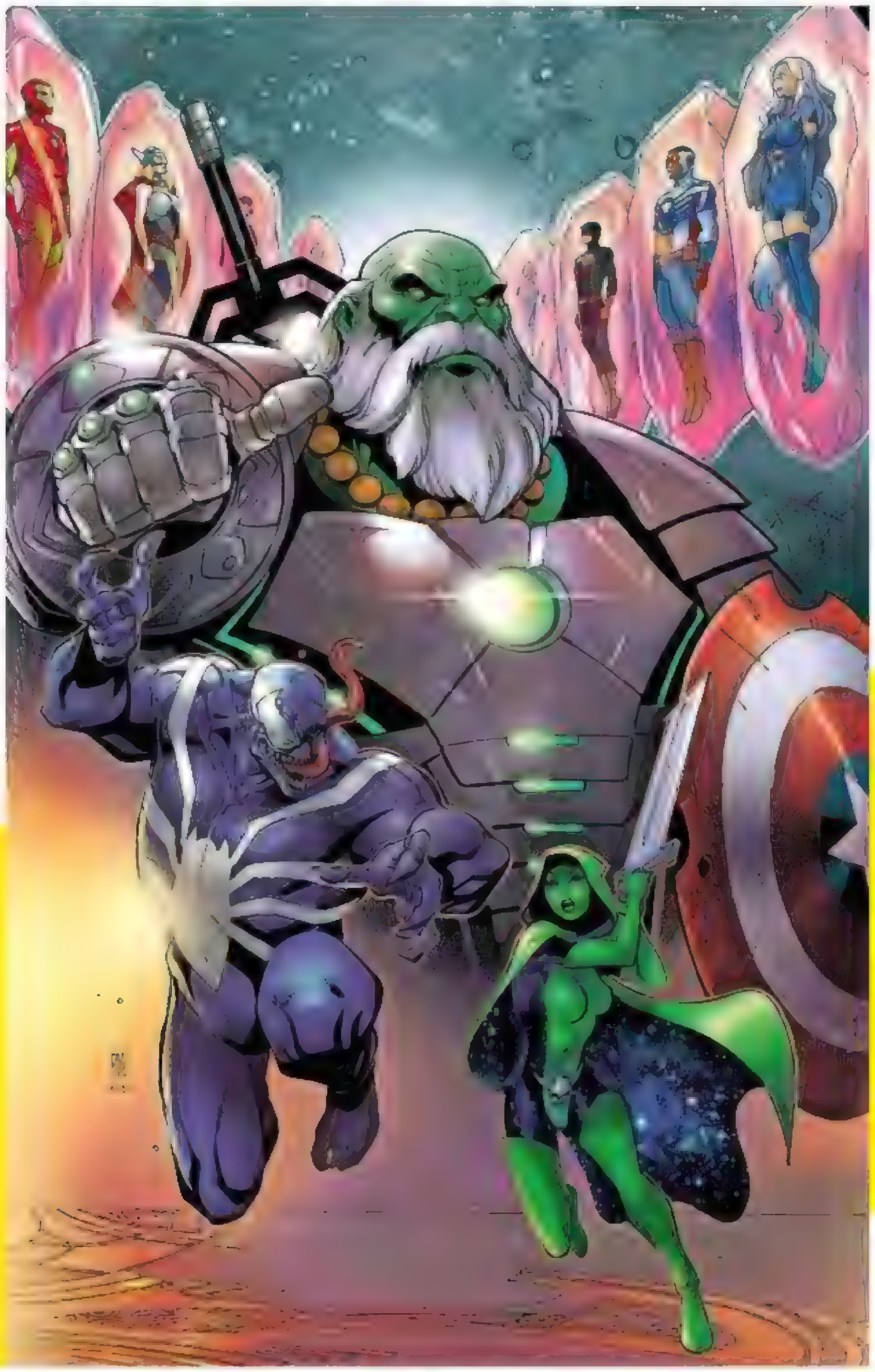

> **“OUR COMICS AND FILMS DO FEED OFF EACH OTHER, BUT OUR FOCUS IS TELLING STORIES”**

telling stories and making them the best they can be,” he insists. “That said, if we know that a character or group is going to be getting a huge amount of exposure in a major Marvel motion picture, we would be foolish not to take advantage of that as well.” Well, quite.

### STARK REIGN

Having amassed an impressive 200,000 in pre-orders for its first issue alone, Brian Michael Bendis and David Marquez’s *Invincible Iron Man* is being promoted as Marvel’s new flagship title. Bendis previously included Shellhead not only in his numerous team line-ups during his almost decade-long run on the various Avengers core titles from 2004 to 2011, but also in *Guardians of the Galaxy*’s first arc in 2013. Despite that he had no immediate plans to take charge of the Golden Avenger’s solo adventures. “Tom Brevoort has offered me the book a few times over the years as I guess he has always liked my Iron Man, and I’ve always appreciated that,” recalls Bendis. “But I’ve always had Tony Stark in my life, so I never previously felt like there was an inch to scratch that wasn’t already been scratched.”

Viewing *Invincible Iron Man* as an opportunity to take his collaboration with his former *Ultimate Spider-Man* artistic foil David Marquez “to the next level”, Bendis will also pen an as-yet-unannounced second Iron Man monthly. “Like the X-Men, Iron Man is like a franchise unto itself, and it really should be treated as such,” he says. “I’ve come up with a great hook for the first issue of *Invincible Iron Man*, which I’m not going to tell you about now, but it sets up all kinds of new possibilities for his relationship with the world around him.”

Graduating to *New Avengers*, *Ultimates* and *Contest of Champions* after his recent spells on *Mighty Avengers* and *Loki*, Al Ewing believes that All-New, All-Different Marvel represents a significant shift in the creative playing field of the Marvel Universe. “It feels a little different, and I’m getting to do a lot of things that feel new and interesting to me,” he says, citing the case of Sunspot’s recent purchase of nefarious scientific cabal A.I.M. in *Avengers World*, which he will carry over to *New Avengers* with the instigation of the so-called Avengers Ideas Mechanics. “I’m

>

**Above:** The new *Contest of Champions* isn’t about rebooting Marvel’s very first crossover, so much as bringing the spinoff game back into the Marvel Universe – and no character is too big or too small to be involved!

**Inset:** Adi Granov’s variant cover for *Invincible Iron Man #1*.

getting to actually not return to the previous status quo, which is a major plus for me, as I generally like it when a big change sticks, and when Jonathan Hickman did that [with A.I.M.] it really caught my imagination. And as a market statement, I suppose it feels like a challenge, a throwing down of the gauntlet."

Following Hickman's departure from *Avengers* and *New Avengers* with the advent of *Secret Wars*, the two core Avengers titles will be written by different authors for the first time since before Brian Bendis's day. While Mark Waid, Adam Kubert and Mahmud Asrar helm *All-New All-Different Avengers*, Ewing collaborates with Gerardo Sandoval on *New Avengers* and Jorge Molina joins G Willow Wilson on the all-female *A-Force*.

"For the most part, Mark is doing his stuff and I'm doing mine," says Ewing. "But there are email chains, and we make use of them. We have the ability to link should something come up, and we will, as time goes on. The same goes for everyone else in the Avengers office, as we're all able to dive into an email session at any time, should the need arise. At the time of writing, we're all working on our own gardens, but pretty soon we'll be meeting around our virtual Legion of Doom-style table again, to plot discord and ruin!" >

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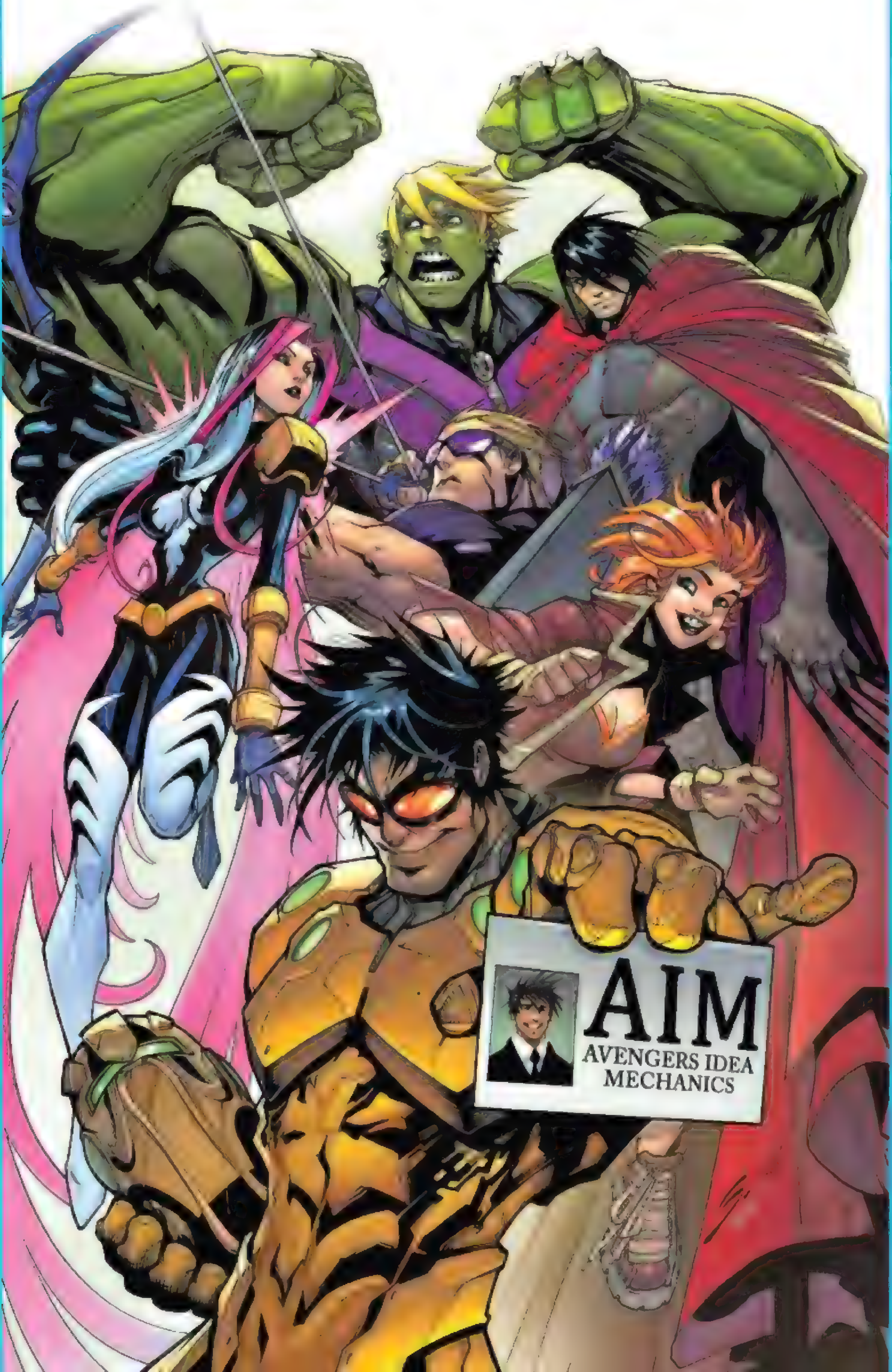
# GAME, SET AND DEATH MATCH

## AL EWING TALKS ABOUT *NEW AVENGERS, ULTIMATES* AND *CONTEST OF CHAMPIONS*



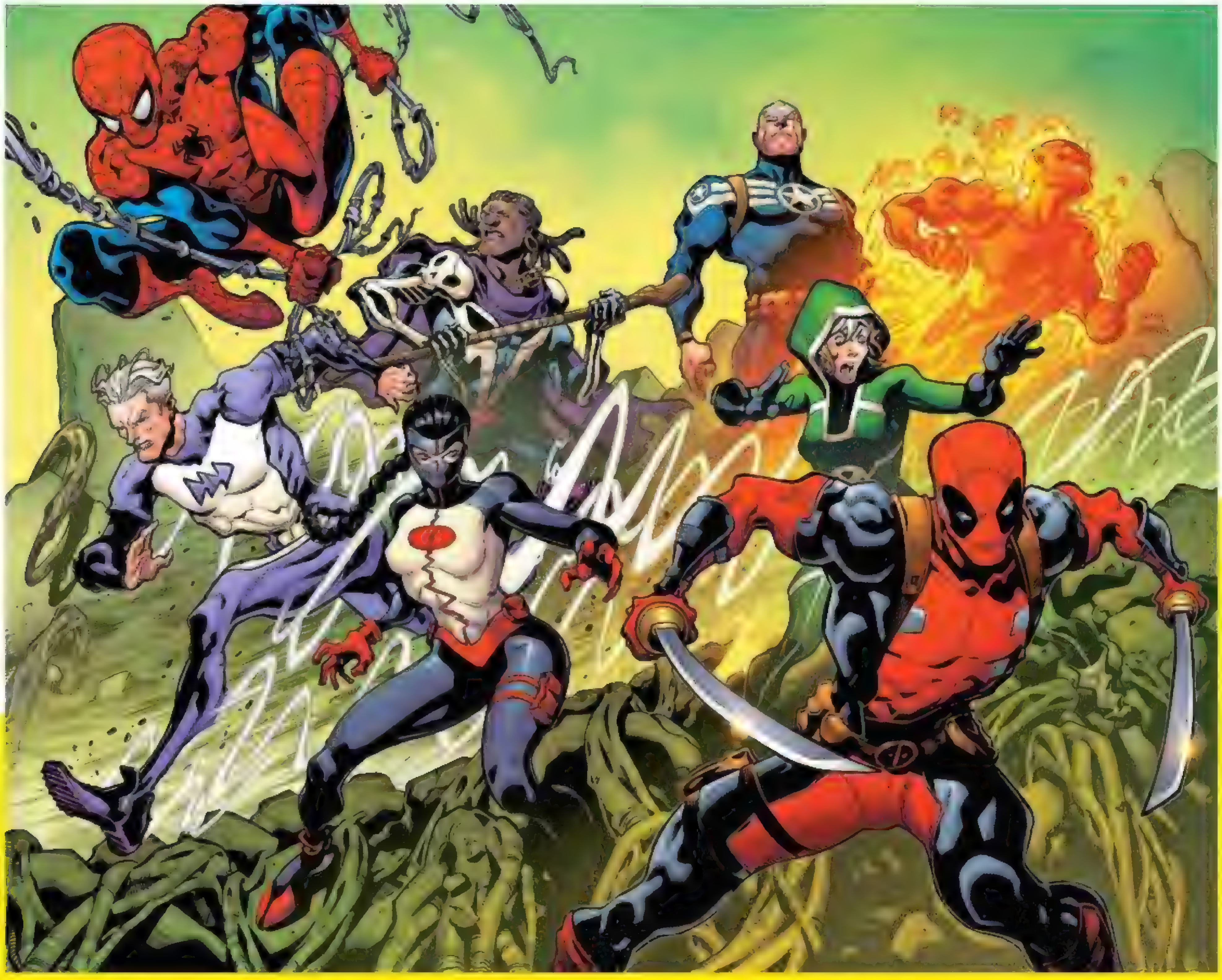
***New Avengers* centres on a reformed A.I.M. Do you like reformed villains?**
People like Sandman and the Rogues' Gallery were big draws for me growing up, and I always hated it when they inevitably turned back to crime. So when Sunspot bought A.I.M. and turned them to the cause of good, less-mad science, I thought it was great and hoped it was a change that'd stick around. And then pretty soon, I found myself in a position to make sure it would.

**In bringing Ultimates into the main Marvel Universe, do you rely on Mark Millar and Bryan Hitch's original run?**
Not really. We go big and widescreen, but we do it in a different way, one maybe more fitting for the Marvel Universe itself. I'm trying to push forward and do big, interesting stuff that maybe hasn't been done quite this way before. There is one big reference, though, as the Triskelion is now in the Marvel Universe, as cool as it ever was, with a few additional attachments built in. That's going to be a lot of fun to play around with.

**With the Ultimate Universe no more, what makes them the Ultimates?**
It's more of a thematic link. These are the Ultimate superheroes, finding and fixing problems. Ultimates is a great name, and it'd be a pity to let it go. But people expecting any Ultimate Universe action are, unfortunately, going to be disappointed.

***Contest of Champions* was Marvel's first crossover in 1980, predating *Secret Wars*. Do you reference the miniseries or the recent video game?**
It's very much inspired by the video game. I've played it, but I'm not so good at it, although I'll give it another serious go once the character I helped invent specifically for this series, Guillotine, drops in the game. We're also bringing back Outlaw, the British Punisher, and I'm really hoping he gets into the game eventually.

**Does *Contest of Champions* emulate similar gladiatorial-format series like *Avengers Arena* and *Secret Wars*, or indeed *The Hunger Games*?**
There are some tenuous links to *Secret Wars* that'll become more obvious in due course. In terms of *Avengers Arena* and *Hunger Games*, there'll always be some shared DNA with stories where people have to fight in arena-type settings. But this isn't quite the hero-versus-hero action people are dreading; it's more hero-versus-villain in a team sport kind of way with occasional deaths and building towards something.



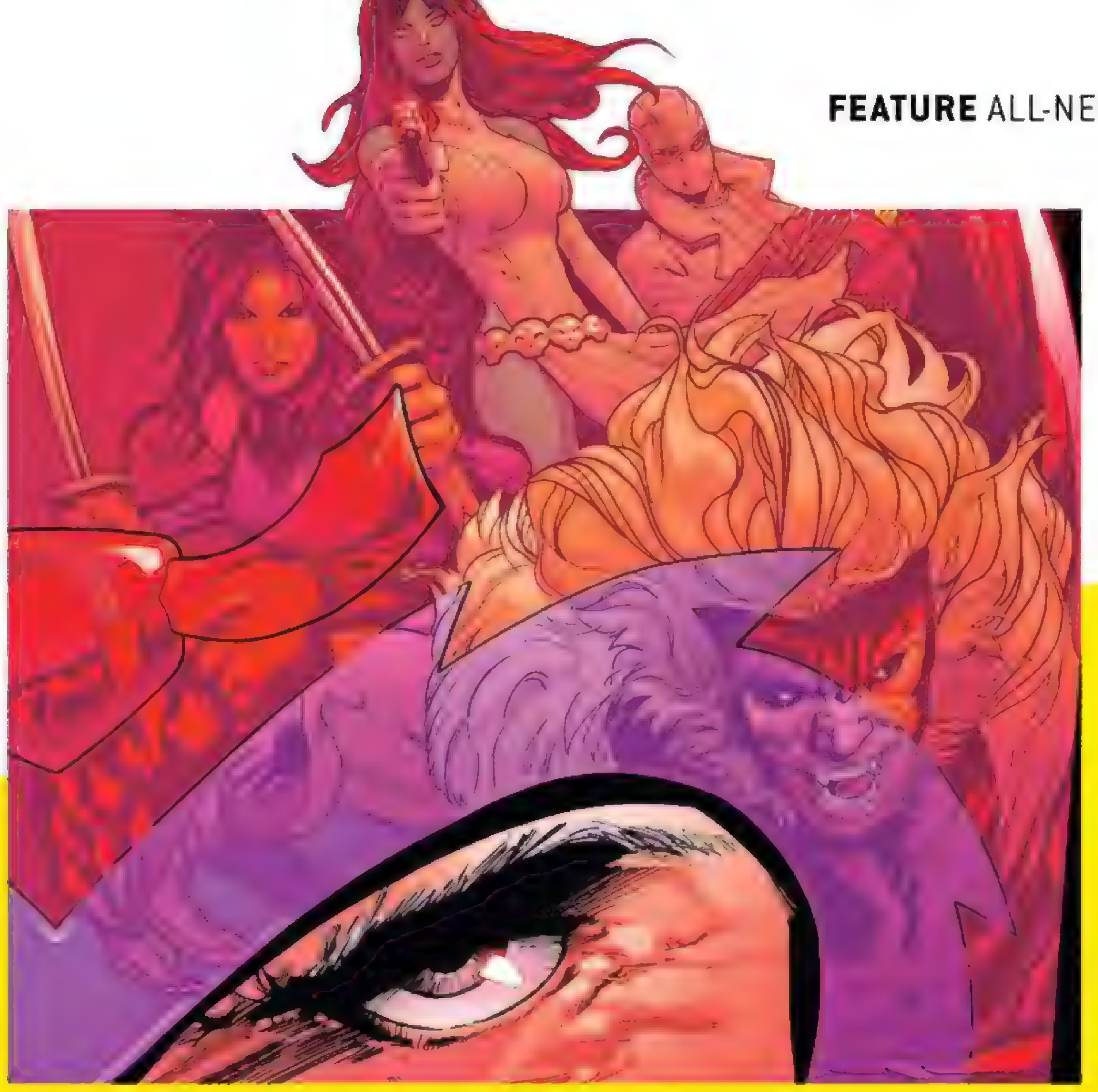
**Above:** Look, the Avengers roster has always been – let's say, rather *fluid*. There have regularly been multiple concurrent teams, like Avengers West Coast. So the Avengers Unity Division, featured in *Uncanny Avengers*, isn't going to confuse anyone coming to the comics from the movies, right?

## UNCANNY AVENGERS ASSEMBLE

In almost as daunting a prospect as replacing Jonathan Hickman on *Avengers*, Gerry Duggan succeeds Rick Remender on *Uncanny Avengers*. Now officially known as the Avengers Unity Division, the often-volatile combo of Earth's Mightiest Heroes and Merry Mutants was intended to build bridges between the two opposing camps after the devastating events of 2012's *Avengers Versus X-Men*. Thematically, it built on Remender's epic *Uncanny X-Force* saga, which was renowned for its labyrinthine storylines.

"Rick had such an amazingly large scope for this book and it's intimidating every time you inherit a book with so many wonderful stories," says Duggan, who hopes that his experience regularly writing *Deadpool* for the past several years will stand him in good stead on *Uncanny Avengers*. "One of the fun things I learned from *Deadpool* was how to play the long game, and also to know when to pay something off. Our first arc is 100 pages from *Avengers #0* to *Uncanny Avengers #4*, while #5 is a standalone one and done, which just felt right as we needed to decompress. So we'll let the individual stories be as long or short as they need to be, and we just agreed on some fun character situations that won't present until at least year two."

With the Merc With A Mouth signing up for *Uncanny Avengers* alongside the Human Torch, Steve Rogers, Spider-Man, Rogue, Quicksilver and Doctor Voodoo, you can expect Duggan to bring Wade Wilson's trademark humour to the fore. "There are some really big surprises in store for this book," teases Duggan, who is partnering with artist Ryan Stegman. "I know



## “WE SOUGHT OUT INTERESTING VOICES TO BRING SOMETHING NEW TO TITLES”

it's hard for retailers to guess at a comic's orders before it launches, and numbers always fluctuate from the first and second issue. But you'll want to give us the benefit of the doubt here, as you don't want the last scene of #2 spoiled on the Internet!"

When Brian Bendis bows out of his X duties after October's over-sized *Uncanny X-Men #600*, scripting the main titles of the Children of the Atom will be split between three writers, with Jeff Lemire teaming with Humberto Ramos on *Extraordinary X-Men* while Cullen Bunn and Greg Land take on *Uncanny X-Men* and Dennis Hopeless and Mark Bagley are on *All-New X-Men*. "Brian is a unique talent and his run has been excellent," says Lemire. "But in our case, having more than one voice is a good thing, as each book can have its own personality. With *Extraordinary X-Men* being the flagship X-book, we get to set the tone for the overall direction of Mutantkind, but Cullen and Dennis are very much involved in that as well. The three of us are working closely to guide Mutantkind in the Marvel Universe. We have a big plan in place and we're all working towards it."

With the Fantastic Four apparently disbanded, Johnny Storm bolsters the ranks of not just *Uncanny Avengers* but also *Uncanny Inhumans*. While Reed Richards and Sue Storm's eventual whereabouts are currently unknown, Ben Grimm heads out into space with the Guardians of the Galaxy. However, that doesn't necessarily result in Iron Man and his fellow members of Earth's Mightiest Heroes assuming a significantly enhanced role in the Marvel Universe. "Could the Avengers be any more prominent than they've already been over the past decade?" ponders Brevoort. "I don't really think so – so they'll continue to be as prominent as ever, even though the stage is also now occupied with the Guardians, the Inhumans and a bunch of other groups as well. But the Avengers books have always been at the heart of the Marvel Universe, the central crossroads, since virtually the beginning, and that isn't going to stop now."

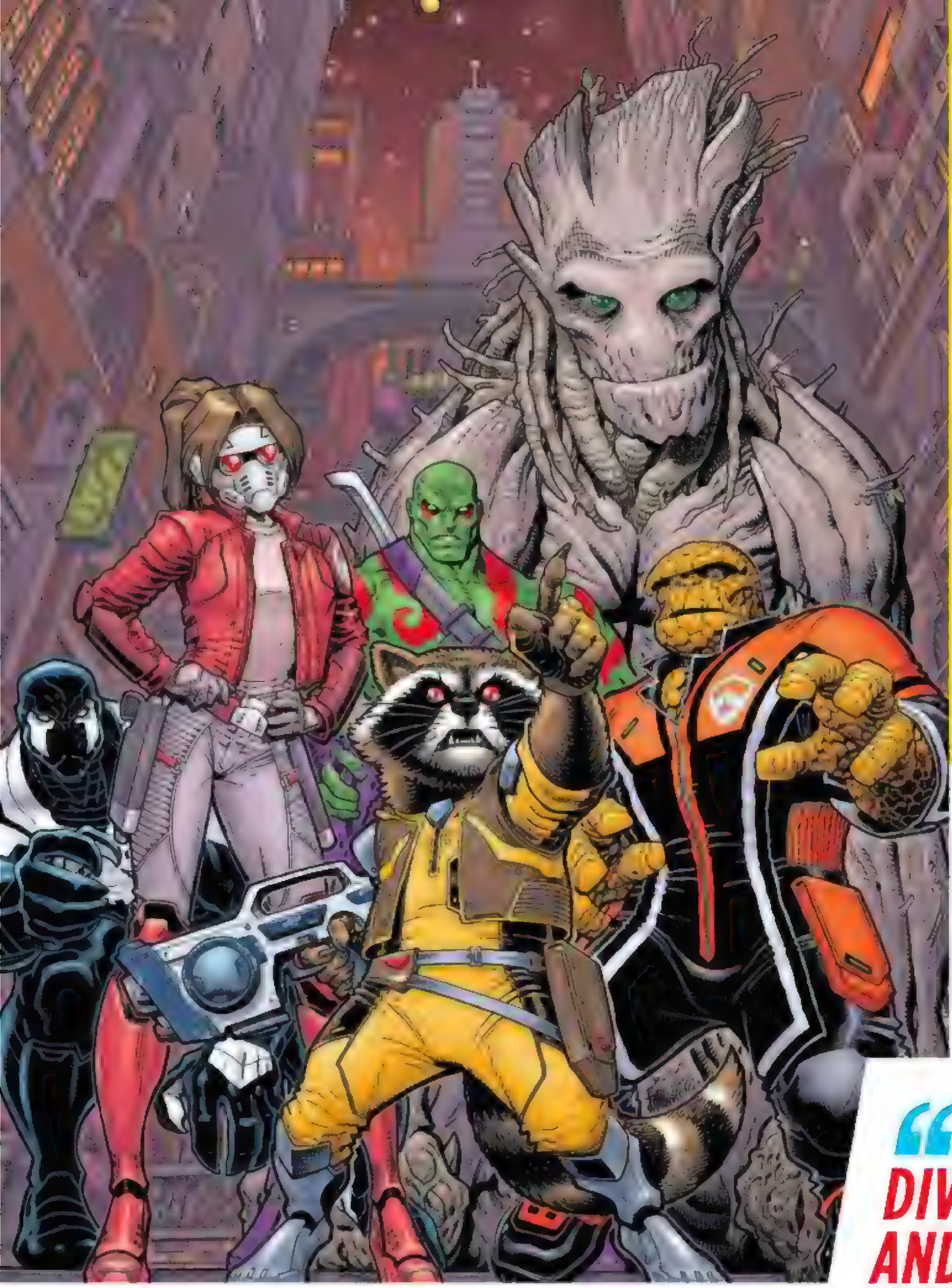
**Top:** The tagline for the new *Uncanny X-Men* is "Bigger threats require more threatening X-Men." But logically, wouldn't bigger threats require bigger X-Men? Bring back the Blob!

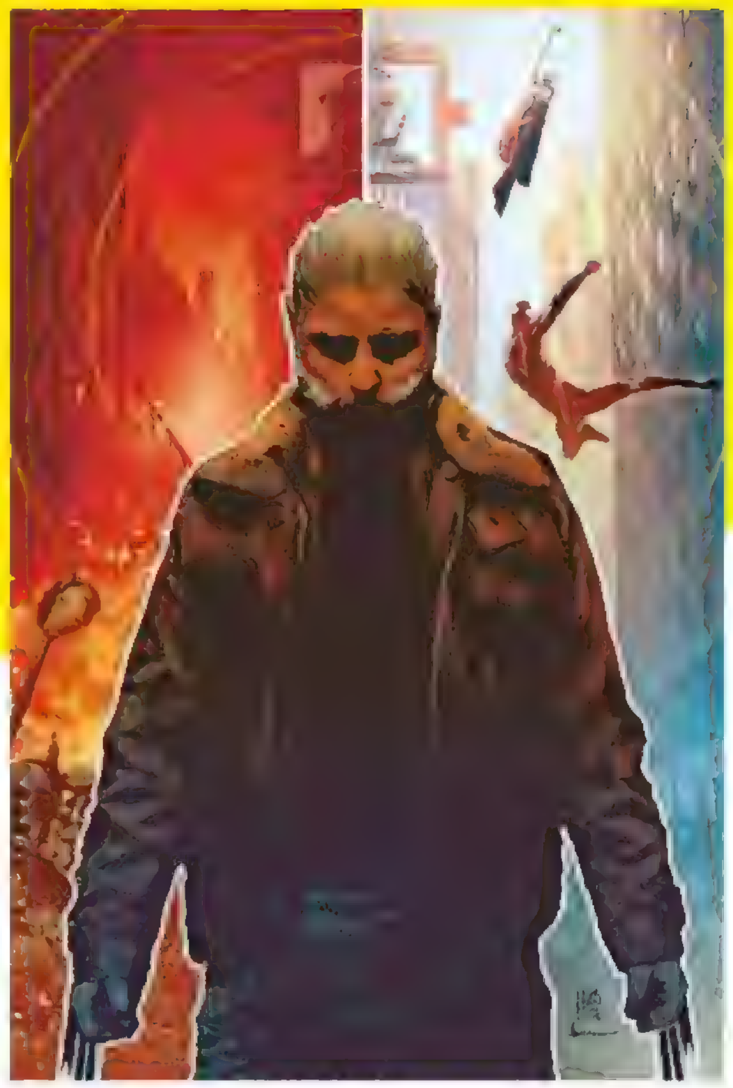
**Inset:** The new Blade is the 16-year-old daughter of the original.

### DISTINCT VOICES, DISTINCT VISIONS

While Jason Aaron and Chris Bachalo tackle *Doctor Strange*, James Robinson and Leonard Kirk are relaunching *Squadron Supreme* and Warren Ellis and Gerardo Zaffino are spinning off Inhumans strategist Karnak into his own solo series, it's business as usual for many other titles, such as *Amazing Spider-Man, All-New Hawkeye* and *Howard the Duck*, which are keeping the same writing and artistic teams. "This was no different than our methodology for when we've done this sort of realignment of our line in the past," says Brevoort. "We sought out interesting voices who might be able to bring something new to the titles and characters that they'd inhabit – both from within our current ranks as well as from outside of them. And throughout the process, creators and editors pitched projects that they felt passionate about."

With *Secret Wars* opening with Marvel's numerous multiverses violently colliding to form the patchwork planet of Battleworld, it remains to be seen whether any other realities, apart from the core >

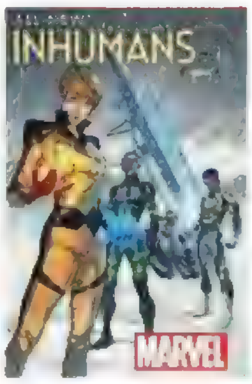




“WE NEED A GREATER DIVERSITY ON THE PAGE AND CREATING THE PAGE”

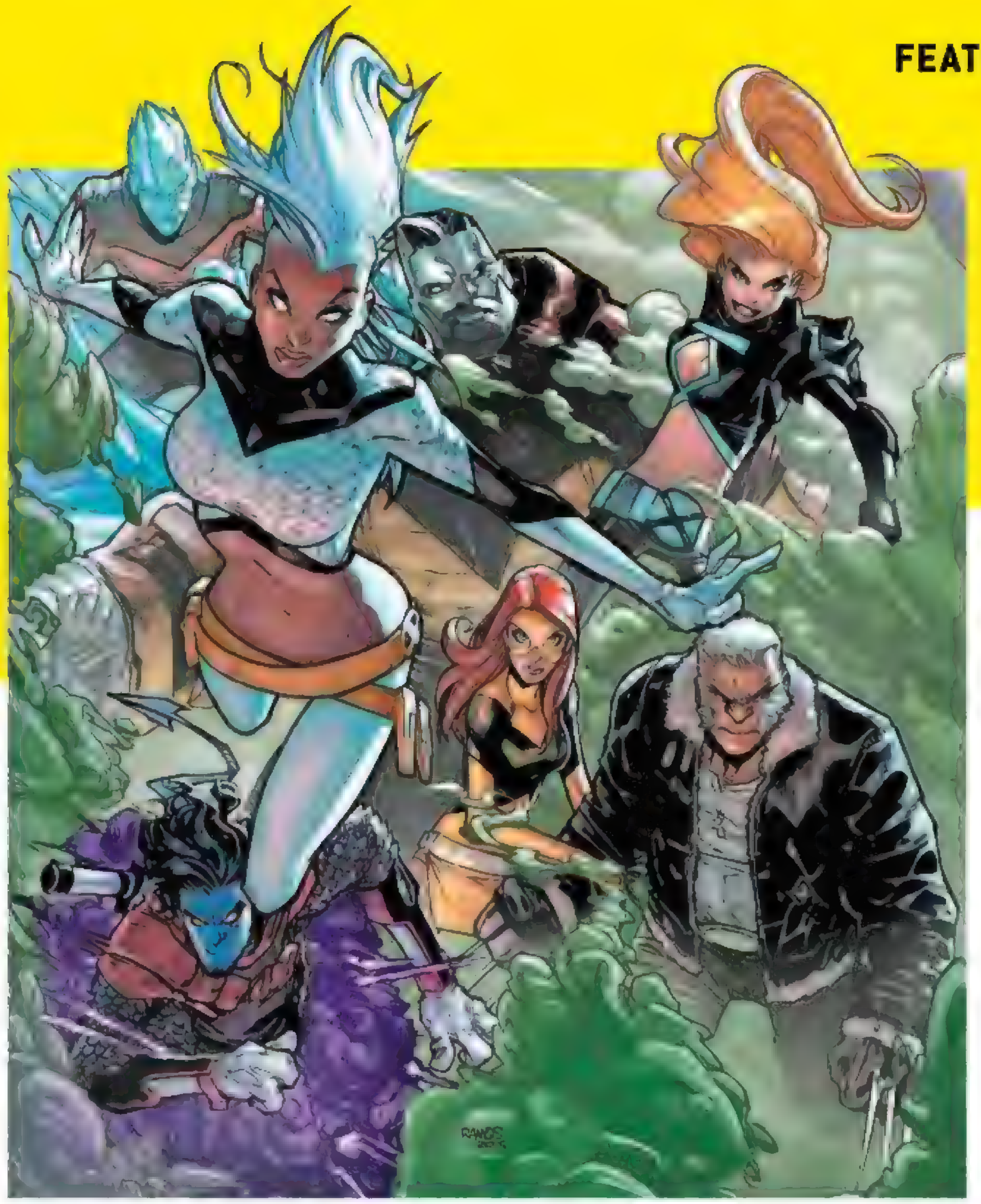
616 universe, will be left standing after the Esad Ribic-illustrated event series concludes with an additional ninth issue in December. For while Brian Bendis and Sara Pichelli’s *Spider-Man* starring Miles Morales and Al Ewing and Kenneth Rocafort’s *Ultimates* will both transfer to the main Marvel Universe, Brevoort is not giving anything away about how they and Spider-verse stalwarts like Spider-Gwen and Web Warriors will be integrated into the bigger picture. “It’s premature to speak about that just yet, as those stories are still to come,” he says. “But each situation presents its own challenges, and hopefully we will meet them at every turn. And if not, then the fans will let us know about it.”

Indicating that the Earth-616 Wolvie is still very much deceased after last year’s *Death of Wolverine*, fans will apparently be able to enjoy the best of both worlds with Jeff Lemire and Andrea Sorrentino’s *Old Man Logan* joined by Tom Taylor and David Lopez’s *All-New Wolverine*, which sees erstwhile X-23 Laura Kinney assuming the adamantium-clawed legacy. “I don’t think that the All-New Wolverine is going to simply be a distaff Logan any more than Old Man Logan will just be a greyer Wolverine,” counters Brevoort. “In others words, those characters are their own individuals, and while they will both have their similarities to the classic Wolverine, they’ll also each present marked differences as well.”



**Above:** The breadth of the Marvel Universe is apparent in *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, *Old Man Logan*, *Extraordinary X-Men* and (inset) *The Inhumans*. It may be the one universe, but they’re pretty different worlds.

Originally created by Mark Millar and Steve McNiven in 2008 as a Dark Knight style dystopian future tale, then resurrected by Brian Bendis for *Secret Wars*, Old Man Logan finds it hard adjusting to life in the present day Marvel Universe. “It throws a totally new light on the character, as you suddenly see Logan surrounded by everyone he saw die, and everyone



he lost. It provides me with an incredible amount of drama to mine," reveals Lemire, who asserts that neither he nor X-23 are stand-ins for their deceased counterpart. "They're both unique characters and they both bring something different. Old Man Logan is very different from the dead Logan. He has lived a lot more and lost a lot more than Logan did. Those years and experiences changed and scarred him, but they also brought blessings too. He had a family, a wife and children. And while he lost them, his time with his family also tempered him in some ways."

### WORKING TOWARDS DIVERSITY

Marvel is continuing its attempt to more accurately reflect in the pages of its comics the different ethnicities and genders that make up its readership, with the former Falcon seemingly taking up the Sentinel of Liberty's august mantle on an indefinite basis in Nick Spencer and Daniel Acuna's *Sam Wilson, Captain America*, and with Jason Aaron and Russell Dauterman's female-led *The Mighty Thor* and G Willow Wilson, Takeshi Miyazawa and Adrian Alphona's Muslim-American *Ms. Marvel* both returning for second volumes. "The proof is going to be in the execution, but the recent emphasis on diversity is more a case of right-sizing than anything else," says Brevoort. "If the Marvel Universe is meant to reflect the larger world that we all live in, then it stands to reason that there needs to be a greater diversity of faces, both on the page and creating the page, and that's what we continue to work towards."

Having replaced the Ultimate Universe's late Peter Parker in 2011 with Miles Morales's mixed- >

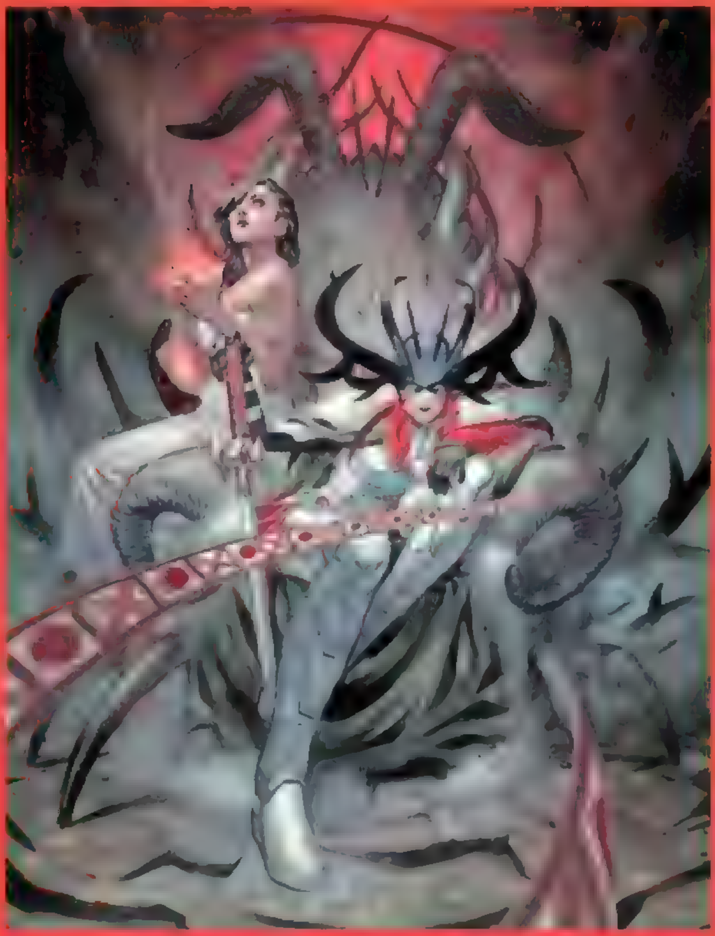
## QUEEN OF THE DAMNED

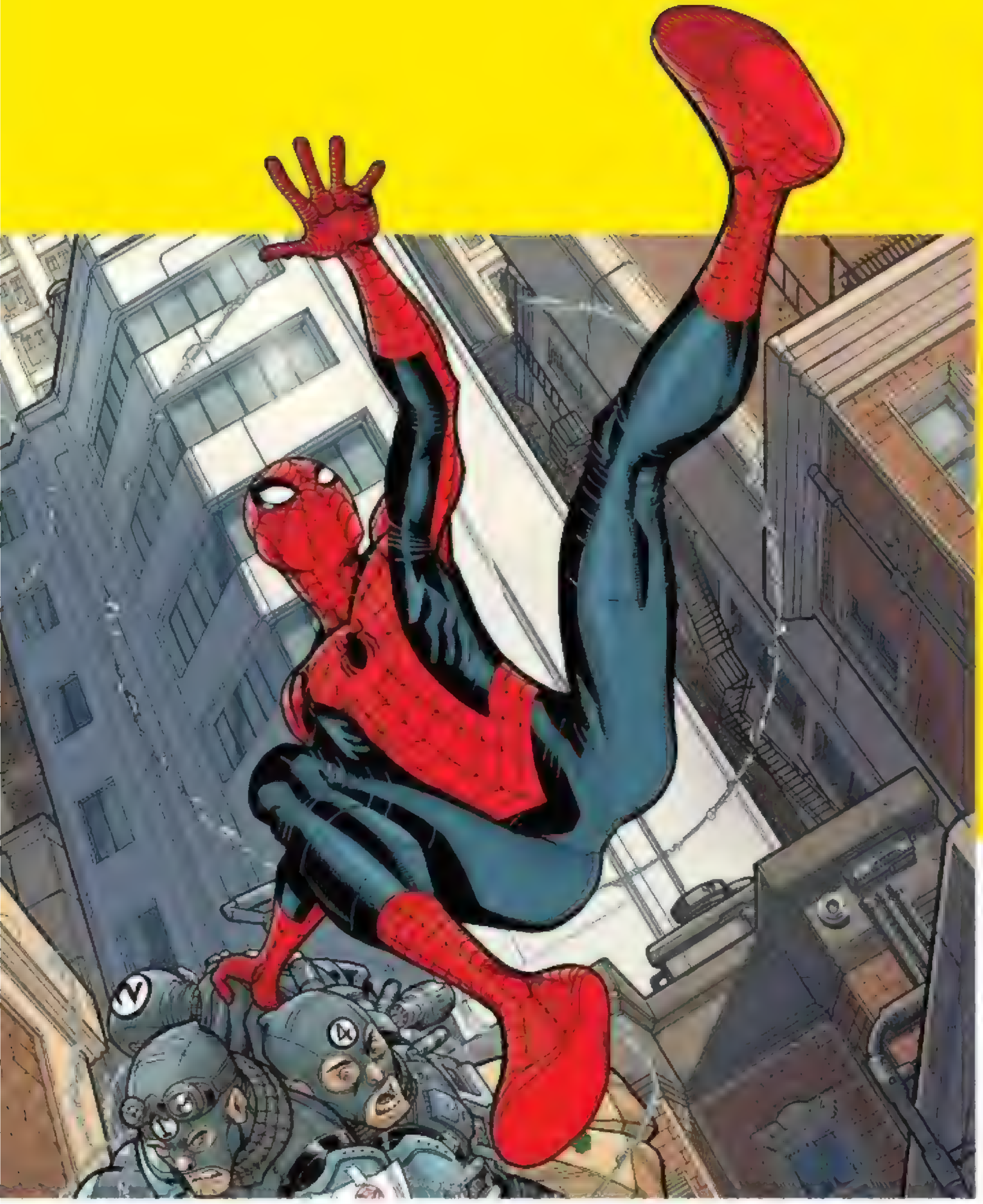
### MARGUERITE BENNETT ON *ANGELA: QUEEN OF HEL*

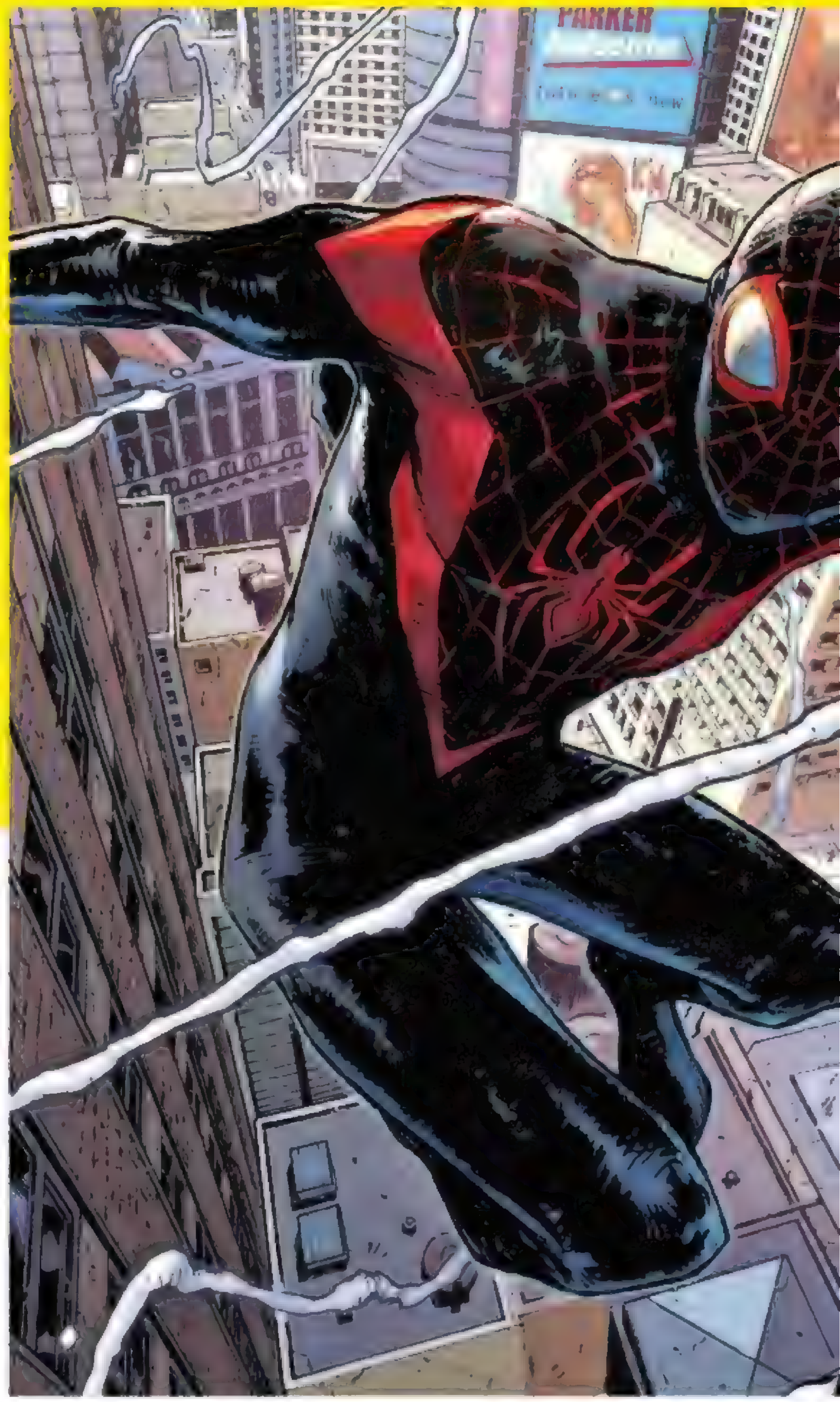
**It's two years since Angela made her Marvel debut in *Age of Ultron*. Is she now more integrated into the Marvel Universe after discovering that she is Thor's long-lost sister?**
She's such an unusual character, I don't know if she is fully integrated into the Marvel Universe, or even if I would want her to be. A great deal of her personality and journey hinges on her being an outsider, a wingless angel. It's the larger-than-life elements – a god without worshippers, a pantheon or a realm – that [make her] more mythic than superheroic, which helps to embroider her into the Thor corners of the Marvel Universe.

**You're now flying solo on *Angela*. Can we expect a significant change in direction?**
Every arc of *Angela* has been a sort of love song and duet between Angela and her companion, Sera. If Angela represents gravity, then Sera is levity; if Angela is mythic, Sera is mortal. Angela focuses on grander balances of power, while Sera loves the intimate, human elements. If our first arc, *Angela: Asgard's Assassin*, was an Asgardian adventure, and our second, *1602: Witch Hunter Angela*, was a period drama then our third, *Angela: Queen of Hel*, is a dark, fantasy romance.

**What's behind the subtitle *Queen of Hel*?**
Angela ended the first arc by discovering that Sera was trapped in Hel, and means to rescue her. It's a bit like Orpheus and Eurydice meets Nordic death metal, although Sera would never let Angela stay this serious for long! Angela cannot steal Sera from Hel, so she must conquer the entire realm!







**Above:** Although the details are being closely guarded at this stage, the Spider-verse too is in for some changes, as well as continuing to fly the flag for increased cultural diversity.

race Spider-Man, Brian Michael Bendis believes that there is still a great deal of progress to be made. "In the past few years, we've seen some pretty big movements in the comic book industry as far as how women and certain cultures and ethnicities are portrayed," he says. "Miles Morales and Ms. Marvel are like the loudest versions of that, and now we have the extra, added bonus of these new launches, as a lot of creators and editors are looking at their material to see where they could do more. So you're now seeing a big pile of diversity coming out of the right places and intentions, and I'm very happy to be a part of that. Ever since I first came to Marvel in 2000, I've been doing my part in that, if only because of my life and family dynamic. I'm aware that there are holes, particularly in American culture, where certain types of people weren't being represented very strongly. Two of my daughters are African-American and, both as women and African-Americans, there wasn't much on TV or in comics that they could relate to, and I would think about that as I went forth with my work."

> **“ALWAYS EXPECT THE SHOCKING, THE THRILLING AND THE MOVING”**

Native-American hero Red Wolf has also been confirmed to be getting his own book, spinning out of the Wild West-themed *1872* book, though it remains to be seen which creators will be responsible for charting his new adventures.

"We still have a long way to go before we're completely representing every possible group of readers to the degree where you don't even think about it any more," says Brevoort. "But that's a journey that we're dedicated to taking. Beyond that, the thing to expect is always the unexpected – the shocking, the thrilling, and the emotionally moving. That's what makes Marvel Marvel!" CH

storemags.com

# Monster squad

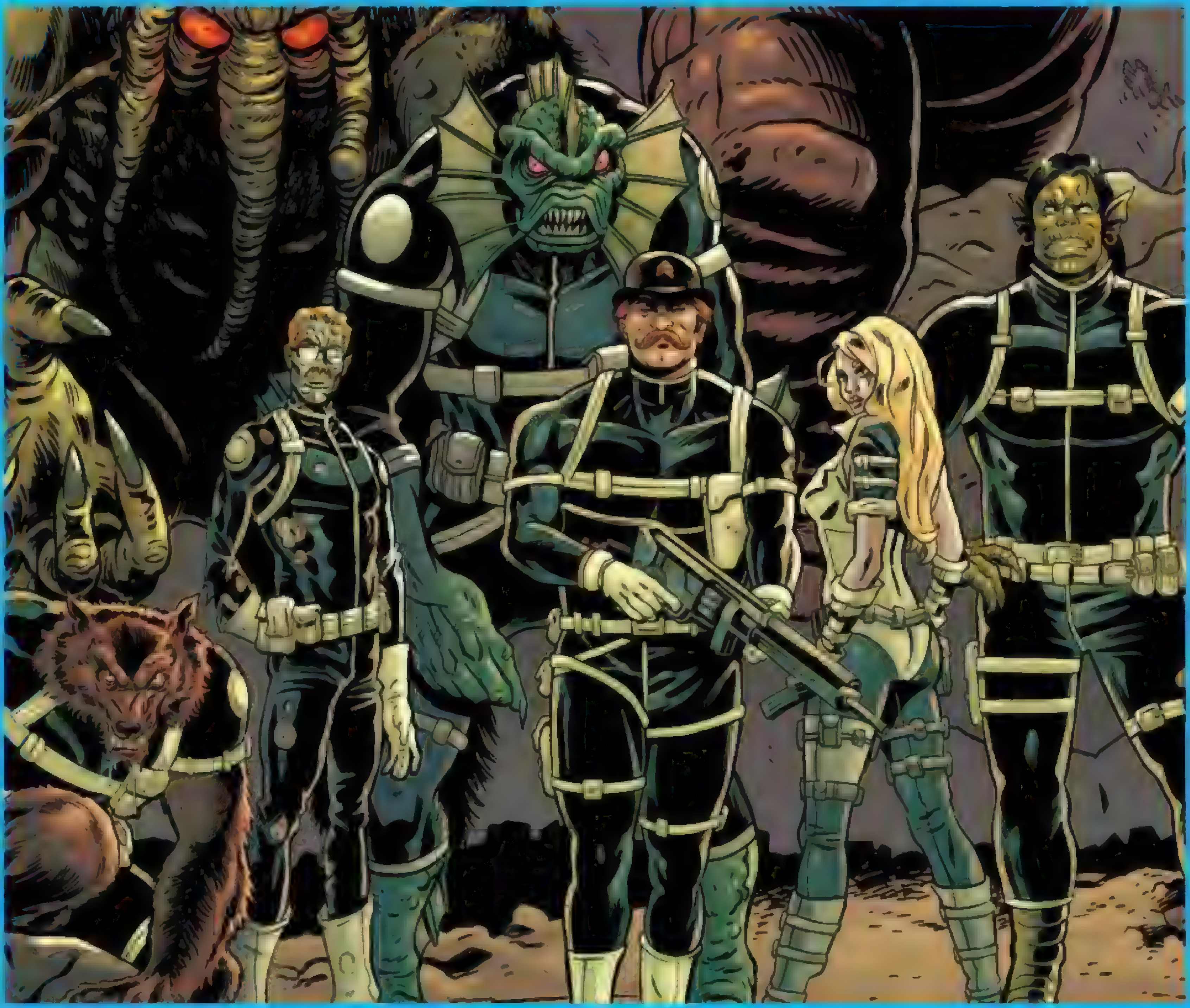
## **FRANK BARBIERE** ON *HOWLING COMMANDOS OF S.H.I.E.L.D.*

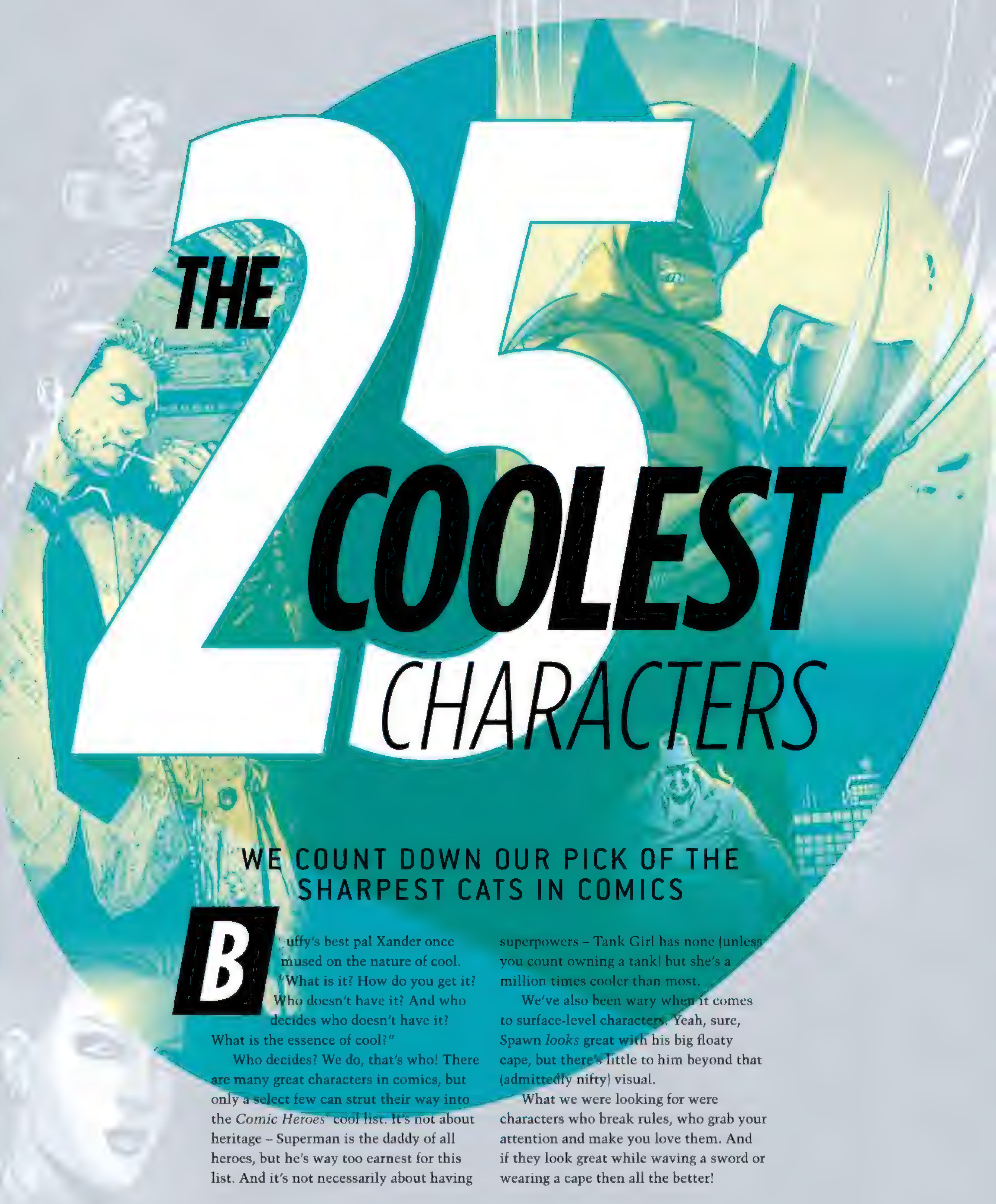
**With members like Werewolf By Night, Man-Thing and Teen Abomination, Howling Commandos of S.H.I.E.L.D. are very different from the team's WW2 incarnation...**
Our All-New, All-Different Howling Commandos are part of a brand new S.H.I.E.L.D. division called S.T.A.K.E. – the Supernatural Threat Assessment and Kill Experts. It's S.T.A.K.E.'s mission to locate, contain and study the supernatural threats in the Marvel U that are outside the capabilities of S.H.I.E.L.D. and the Avengers. They deal with all kinds of monsters and threats that can only be dealt with by monsters of their own.

**Dum Dum Dugan, who made a comeback in the recent S.H.I.E.L.D. anniversary issue, leads the Howling Commandos here...**
He's the connective tissue with the old Commandos. He sees this collection of oddities as something more than just "monsters," and he's the one who is going to make them a team. More importantly, he teaches them that they are in control of their own identity, although Dum Dum is struggling with his own identity, which makes him a great mentor and leader of our new Commandos.

**Are you enjoying collaborating with artist Brent Shoonover?**
Brent's style has given the book a wonderful unique tone that allows it to be action-packed as well as not entirely self-serious. He's also embraced the weirdness, coming up with a lot of incredible monster designs and action sequences.

**What adversaries will the Howling Commandos come up against?**
There's definitely a villain who is going to surface that Marvel fans will recognise from some older comics, but we're keeping him under wraps for now. The first issue has our team jumping into a mission fighting plant zombies! They tie into an ancient relic the Commandos are tasked with recovering, which ties into the bigger plot that will reveal itself in our first arc. We're building towards a lot of exciting things such as new characters, S.T.A.K.E.'s secrets, and the past of many of our characters.





# THE 25 COOLEST CHARACTERS

## WE COUNT DOWN OUR PICK OF THE SHARPEST CATS IN COMICS

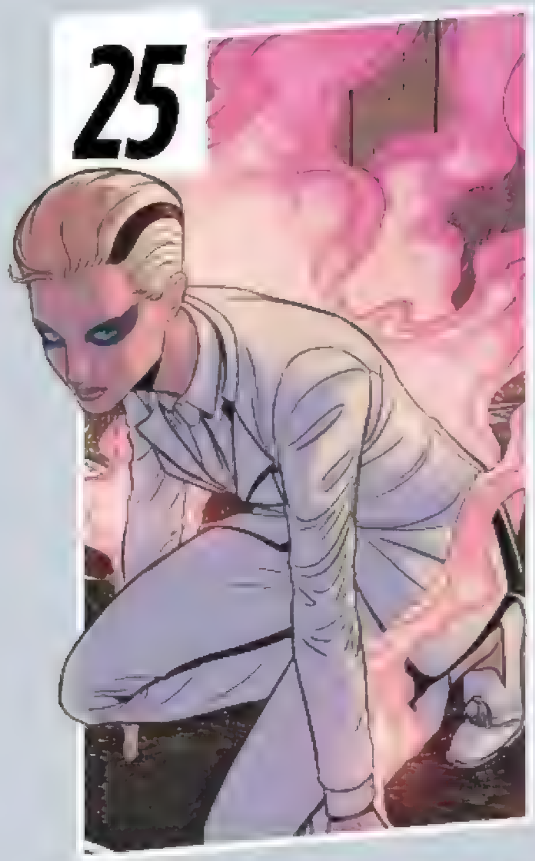
**B**uffy's best pal Xander once mused on the nature of cool. "What is it? How do you get it? Who doesn't have it? And who decides who doesn't have it? What is the essence of cool?"

Who decides? We do, that's who! There are many great characters in comics, but only a select few can strut their way into the *Comic Heroes'* cool list. It's not about heritage – Superman is the daddy of all heroes, but he's way too earnest for this list. And it's not necessarily about having superpowers – Tank Girl has none (unless you count owning a tank) but she's a million times cooler than most.

We've also been wary when it comes to surface-level characters. Yeah, sure, Spawn *looks* great with his big floaty cape, but there's little to him beyond that (admittedly nifty) visual.

What we were looking for were characters who break rules, who grab your attention and make you love them. And if they look great while waving a sword or wearing a cape then all the better!

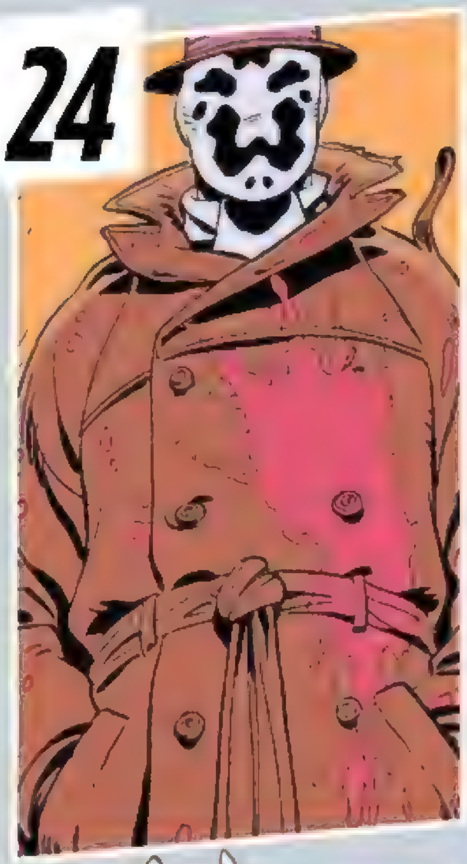
## 25



## LUCI

There have been many comic book interpretations of the devil over the years, but none quite as sardonic and elegant as Luci from Kieron Gillen and Jamie McKelvie's *The Wicked + The Divine*. "Luci" (geddit?) looks like a female Berlin-period Bowie and has a devious wit, immaculate style and special powers. You'd be a fool to trust her, but she's still one of the more pleasant members of the Pantheon.

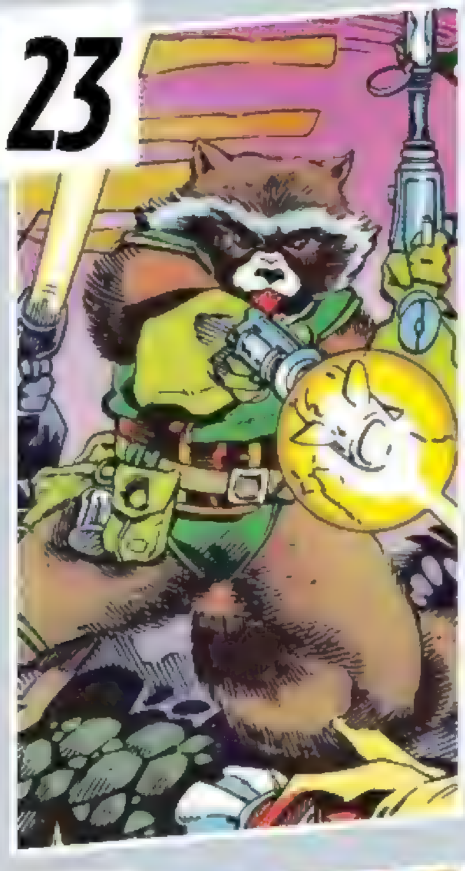
## 24



## RORSCHACH

*Watchmen*'s blot-faced vigilante is a four-colour Travis Bickle – a violent psychopath who's only nominally on the side of right. Fans love him, but his politics and brutal methods are deeply questionable. Still, there's no doubting that Walter Kovacs looks amazing, with his trench coat and ever-shifting mask and he opposes Ozymandias's murderous "for the greater good" decisions.

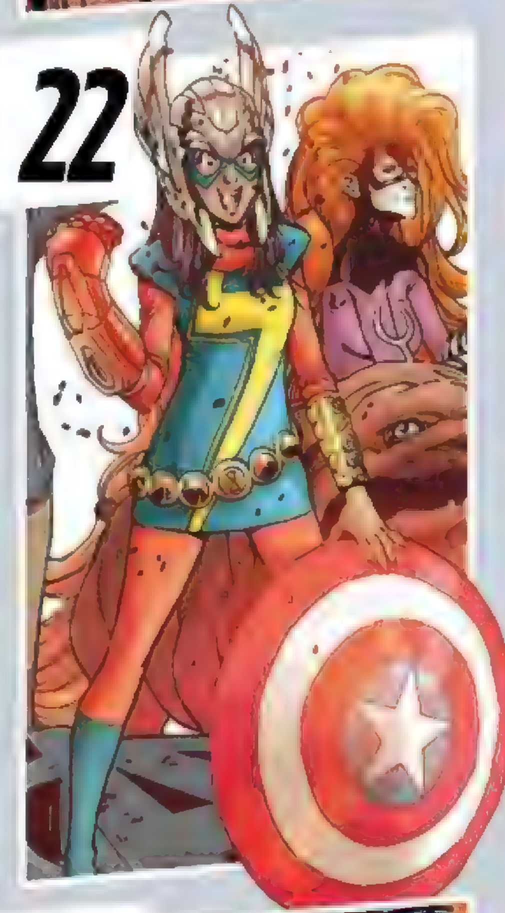
## 23



## ROCKET RACCOON

He's a ferocious cyber-furball with a bad attitude and a taste for heavy weaponry. Rocket has been propelled into popularity by the *Guardians of the Galaxy* movie, but comics readers have known how funny and fearless he is since 1976. He's also a deadshot with a rifle and was named after a Beatles song – now that's pretty cool.

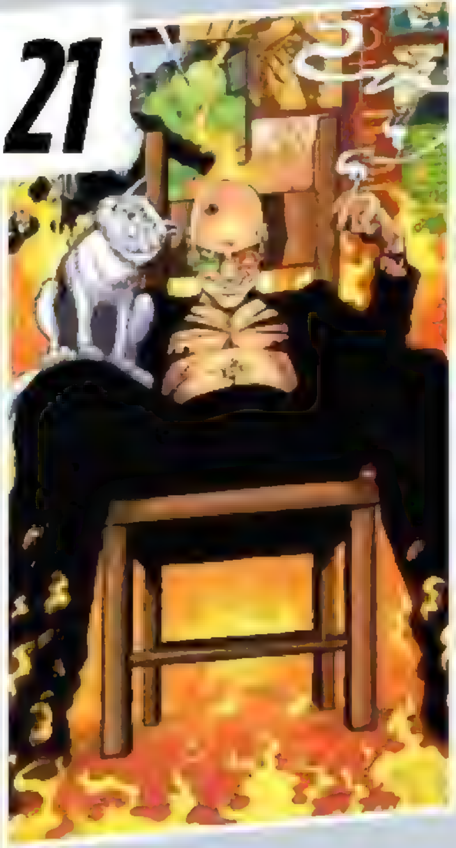
## 22



## KAMALA KHAN

The current Ms. Marvel is Marvel's first muslim superhero, but that's not why she's on this list. Like Peter Parker, Kamala is a teenager first and a hero second and it's because of this that she's become such an idol for outsiders of all ages. She has problems, sure, but she also has a lot of fun and follows her own path in life.

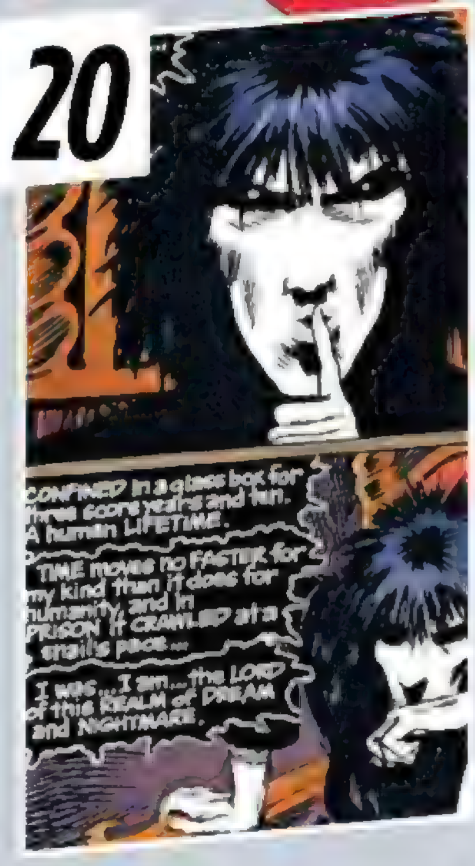
## 21



## SPIDER JERUSALEM

He's old, he's bald and he wears stupid glasses. *Transmetropolitan*'s Spider Jerusalem is still cooler than you. A misanthropic combination of Hunter S Thompson and HL Mencken, no one wields the f-bomb quite like Spider. Plus his weapon of choice is a Bowel Disruptor gun which will quite literally make you crap your pants.

## 20


CONFINED in a glass box for three score years and ten. A human LIFETIME.
TIME moves no FASTER for my kind than it does for humanity, and in PRISON it CRAWLED at a snail's pace...
I was... I am... the LORD of this REALM of DREAM and NIGHTMARE.

## DREAM OF THE ENDLESS

The none-more-goth hero of Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* is often in the background, or only tangentially involved in the stories we're reading, but when he appears he's always striking. With ice-white skin, glimmering stars for eyes and a shock of black hair that Robert Smith would be envious of, he became an instant style icon for generations of fans. >

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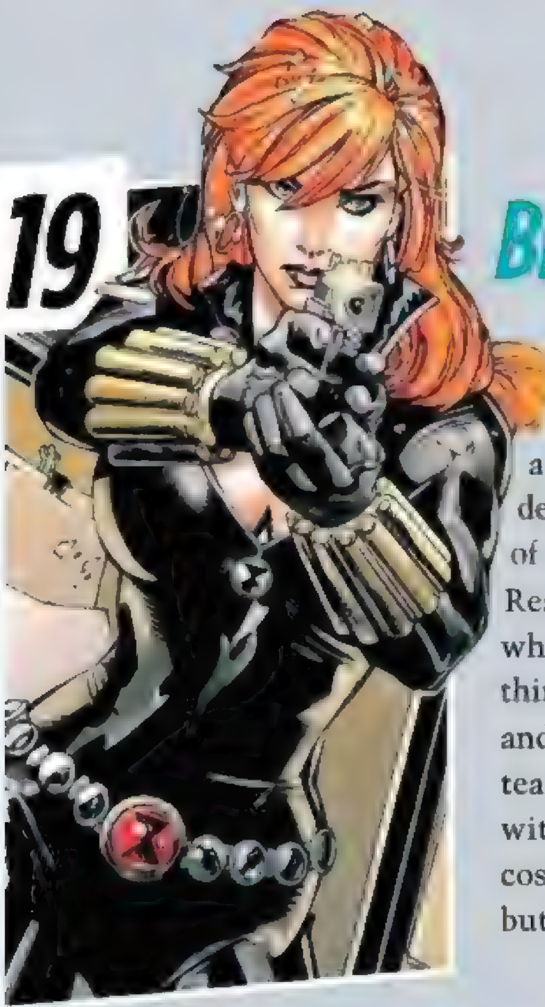
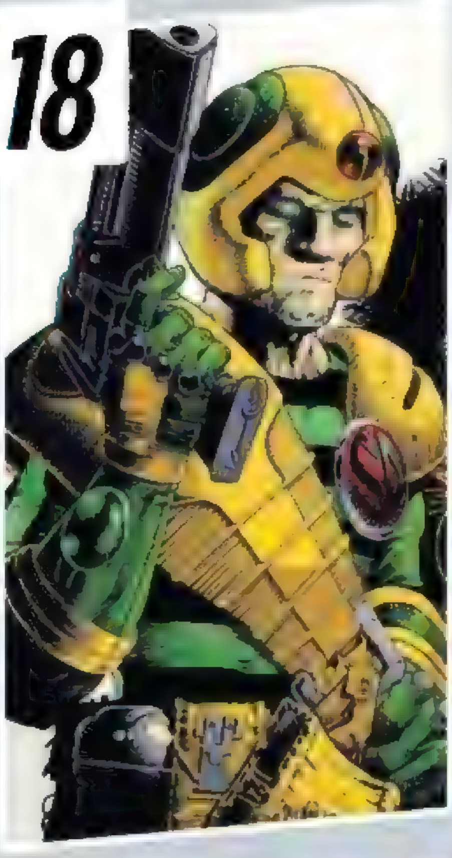


## 19

## BLACK WIDOW

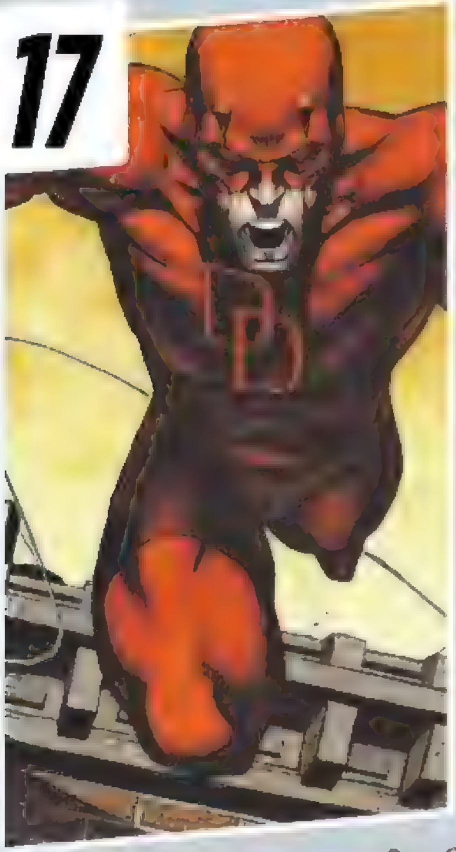
The First Lady of the Avengers, Natalia "Natasha" Romanoff was a Russian spy before she defected. Now she's an agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. and Avenger. Resourceful, hard as nails and whip-smart, Romanoff is the thinking woman's superhero, and able to hold her own in a team which includes people with astonishing powers. Her costume is slick too – a cool but practical cat-suit.



## 18

## JOHNNY ALPHA

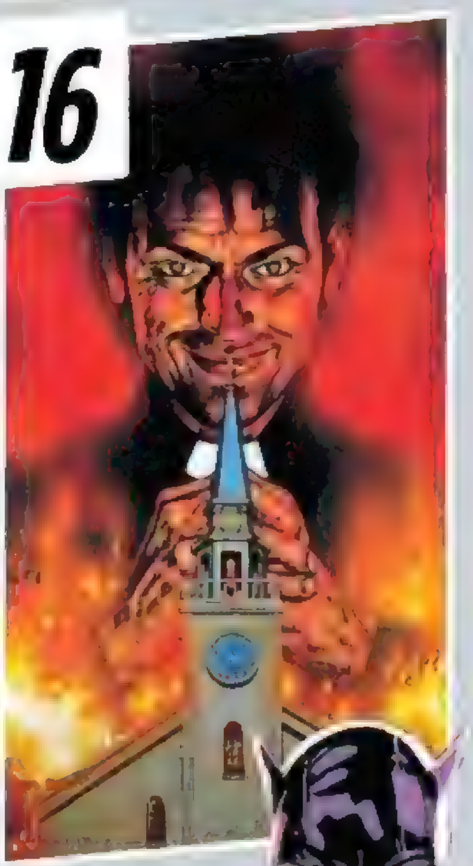
*2000 AD*'s Johnny Alpha is a Strontium Dog – a mutant and a bounty hunter. His glowing eyes, psychic powers and array of fearsome weapons make him a fearsome opponent, but he is also a fierce champion of the underdog. Do you want more proof of how cool he is? Johnny once caught Hitler and brought him into the future to face justice.



## 17

## DAREDEVIL

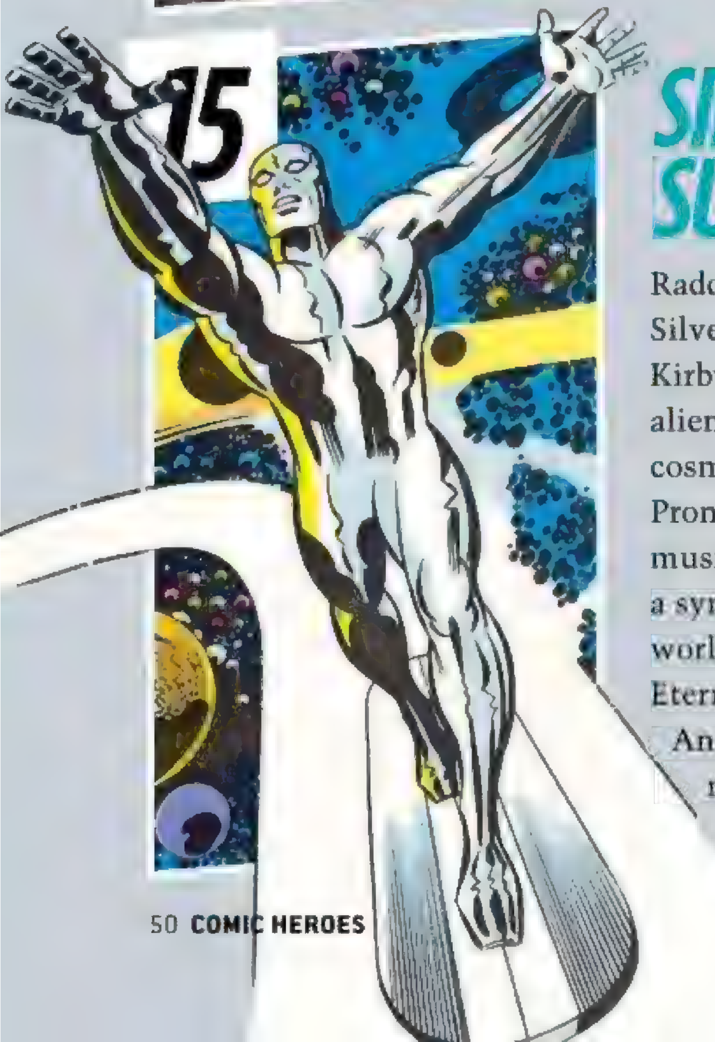
Daredevil's appeal is simple but clear: he's the Batman that could be you. While Bruce Wayne was born into wealth, Matt Murdock was from the streets. Abandoned by his mother and blinded by radioactive material, he still never gave up. Using his enhanced other senses (a handy side-effect of that little radioactive mishap), he took to fighting crime wherever he found it.



## 16

## JESSE CUSTER

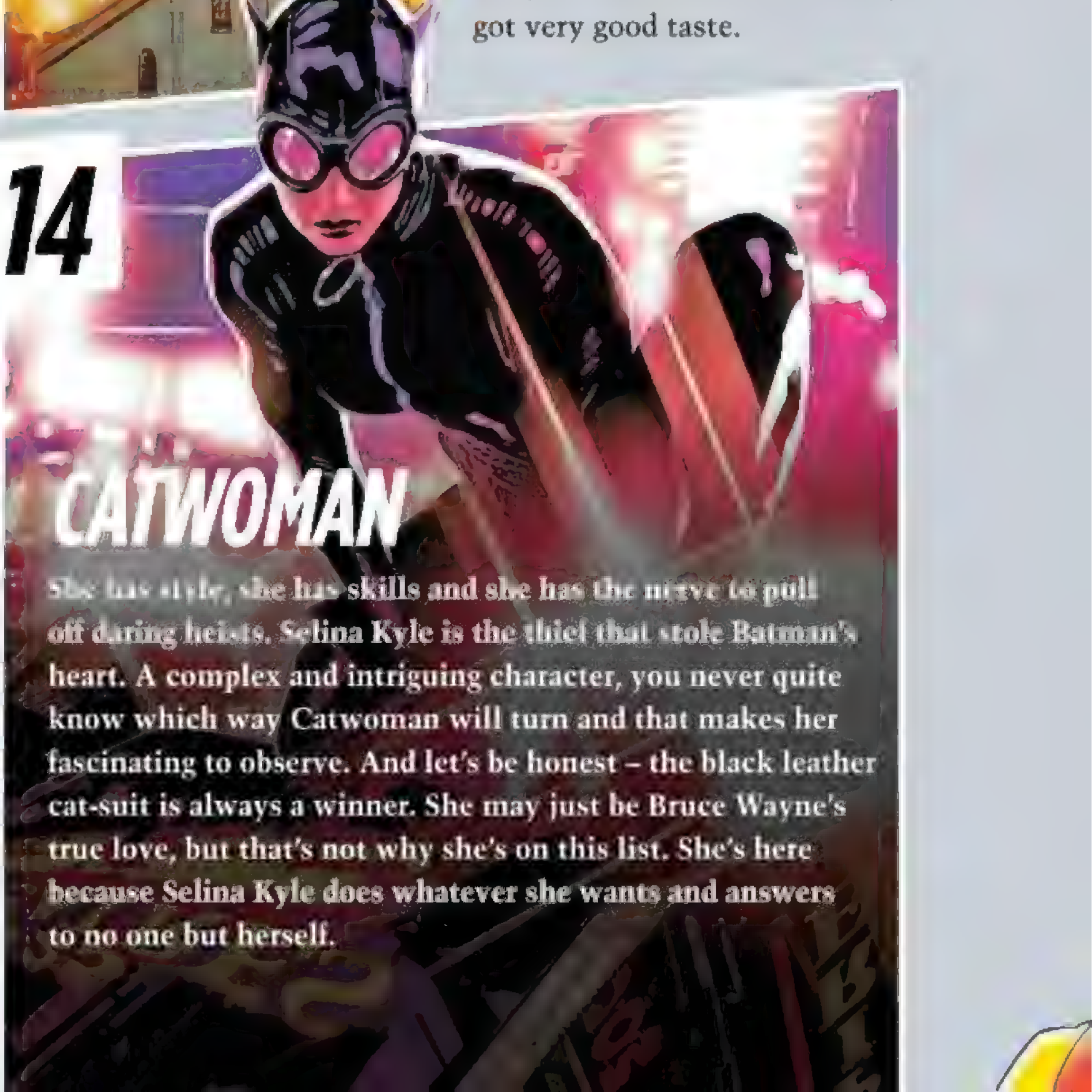
The star of Garth Ennis's *Preacher*, and the toughest clergyman you'll ever meet. Originally a small town minister in the deep South, he merges with a supernatural entity called Genesis and gains the Word of God – a power that gives him the ability to control anyone who hears him speak. Despite this nifty gift, he remains deeply moral. He's also, as a Bill Hicks fan, clearly got very good taste.



## 15

## SILVER SURFER

Radd by name, rad by nature. Silver Surfer was one of Jack Kirby's finest creations – an alien outsider riding the cosmic winds on a surfboard. Prone to philosophical musings, Radd would become a symbol of the '60s hippy worldview. "Now, I ride the Eternal winds once more! And none shall ever be my master!" Right on.

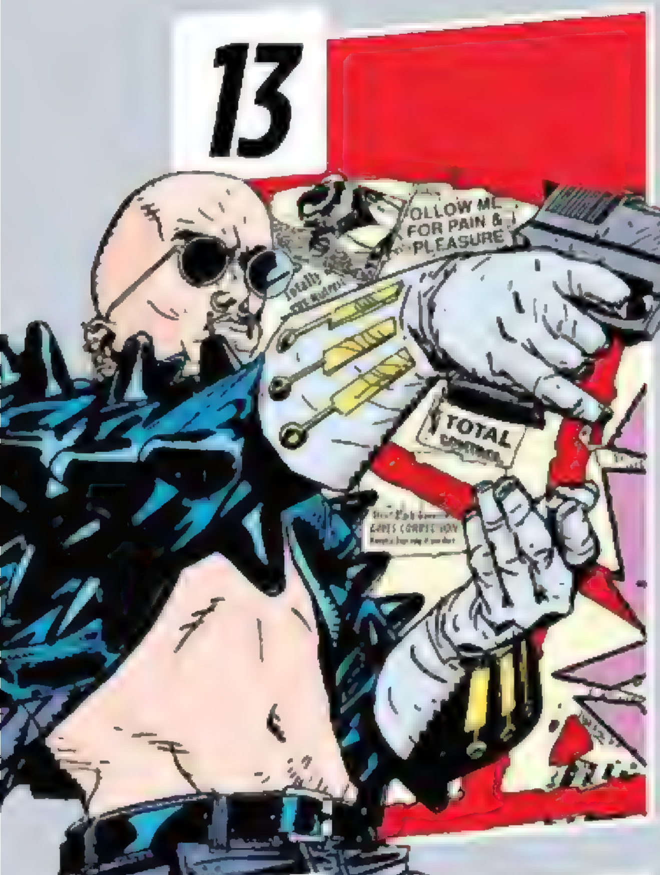


## 14

## CATWOMAN

She has style, she has skills and she has the nerve to pull off daring heists. Selina Kyle is the thief that stole Batman's heart. A complex and intriguing character, you never quite know which way Catwoman will turn and that makes her fascinating to observe. And let's be honest – the black leather cat-suit is always a winner. She may just be Bruce Wayne's true love, but that's not why she's on this list. She's here because Selina Kyle does whatever she wants and answers to no one but herself.

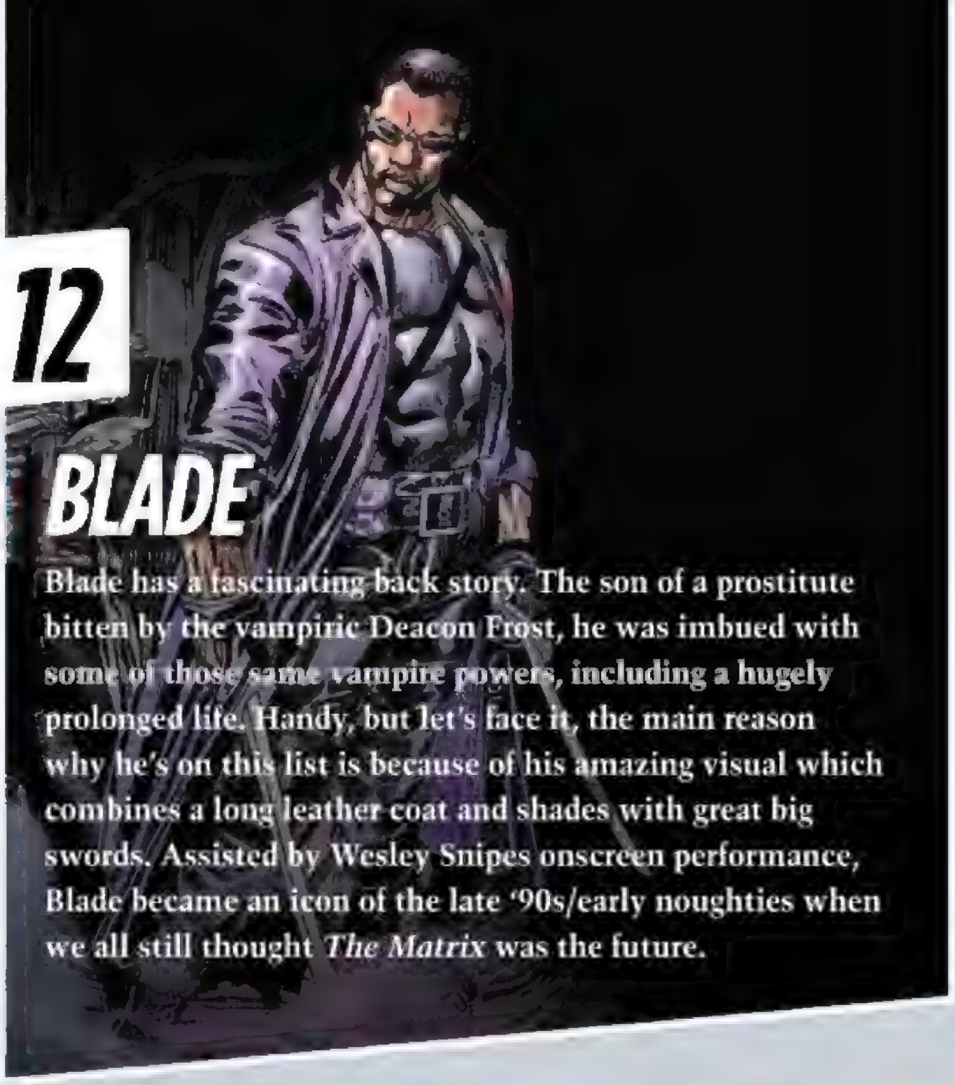
## 13


FOLLOW ME FOR PAIN & PLEASURE
TOTAL CONTROL

## KING MOB

A tall, bald assassin with a taste for fetish gear, James Bond and the occult. King Mob is a deadly kung fu master, but in contrast to many similar comic characters, he's also troubled by the violence that he's involved in – by the end of *The Invisibles* he has renounced it completely. He looks suspiciously like Grant Morrison did in the '90s...

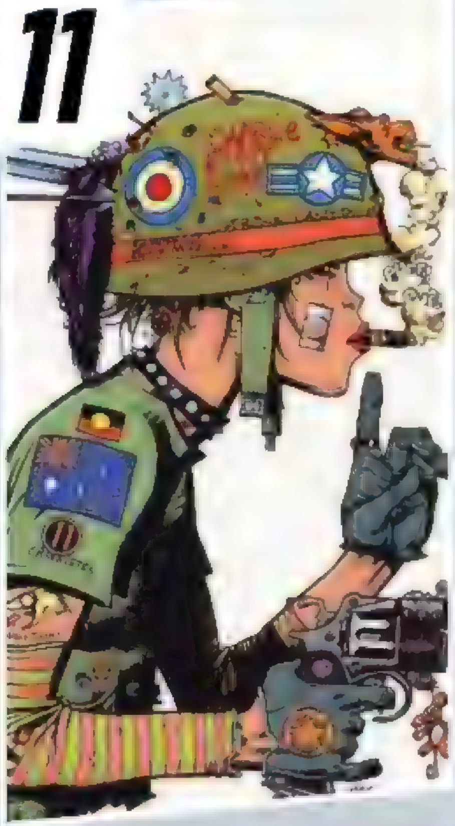
## 12



## BLADE

Blade has a fascinating back story. The son of a prostitute bitten by the vampiric Deacon Frost, he was imbued with some of those same vampire powers, including a hugely prolonged life. Handy, but let's face it, the main reason why he's on this list is because of his amazing visual which combines a long leather coat and shades with great big swords. Assisted by Wesley Snipes onscreen performance, Blade became an icon of the late '90s/early noughties when we all still thought *The Matrix* was the future.

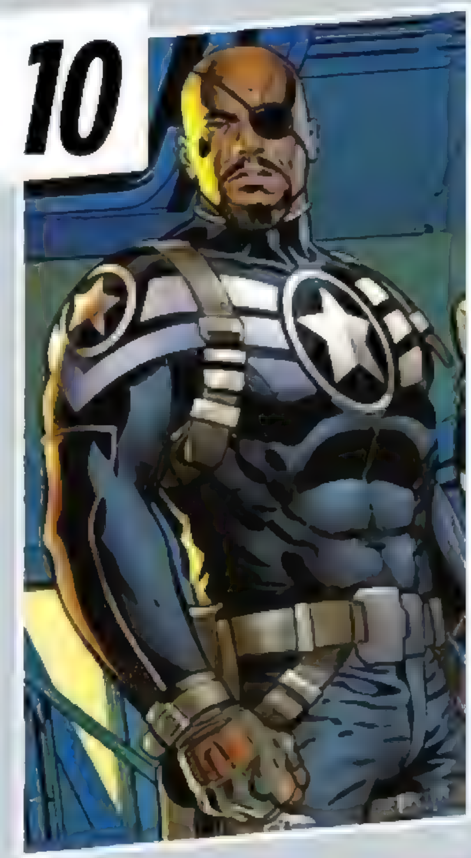
## 11



## TANK GIRL

Of the time she may be, but there's no doubting Tank Girl's continued relevance. Jamie Hewlett and Alan Martin struck anarcho-punk gold when they came up with the adventures of Rebecca Buck and her mutant kangaroo boyfriend Booga. It was funny, it was filthy, the plots – when there were plots at all – were nonsensical and it fitted the mood of the late '80s/early '90s perfectly.

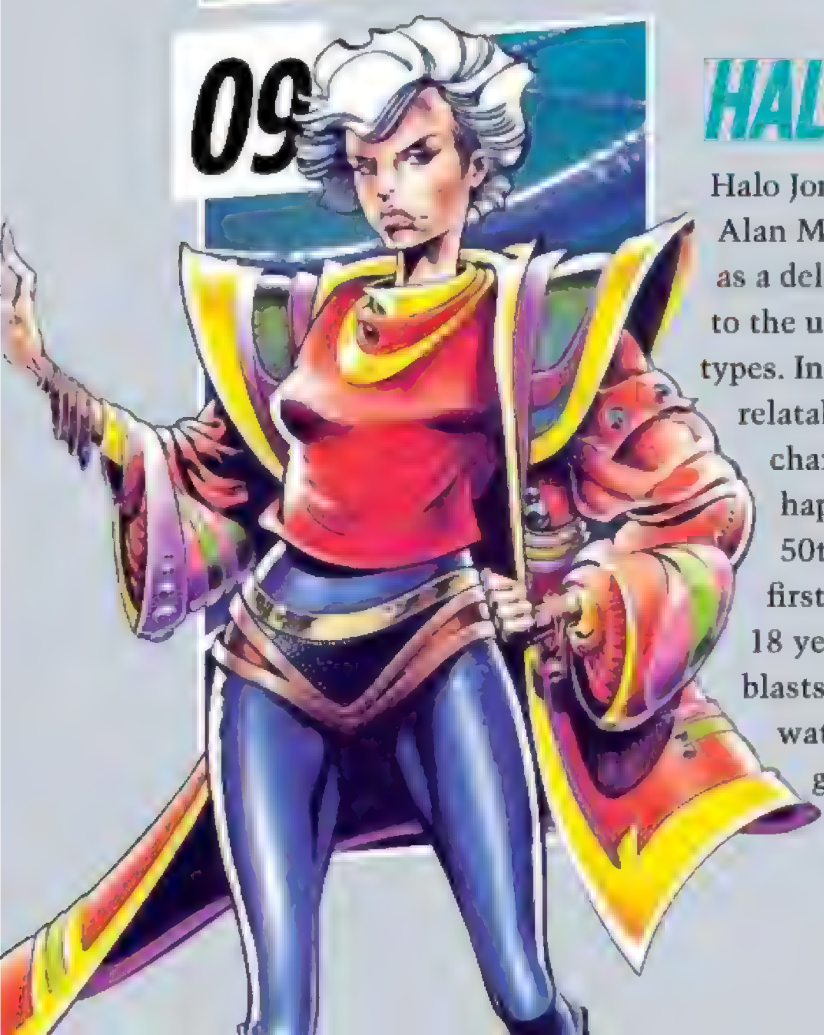
## 10



## NICK FURY JR

Original Nick Fury was hard as nails but not especially *cool*. Then Mark Millar and Bryan Hitch decided to turn him into Samuel L Jackson for the *Ultimates* line and it all fell into place. He was a slicker, more stylish figure and the regular Marvel universe quickly accepted this as the definitive version. Original Nick Fury has retired, and his African American son, Nick Fury, Jr. has taken his place.

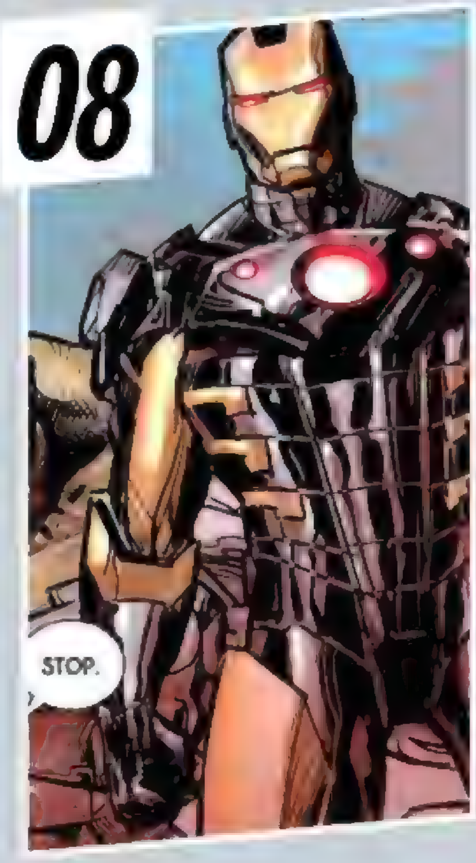
## 09



## HALO JONES

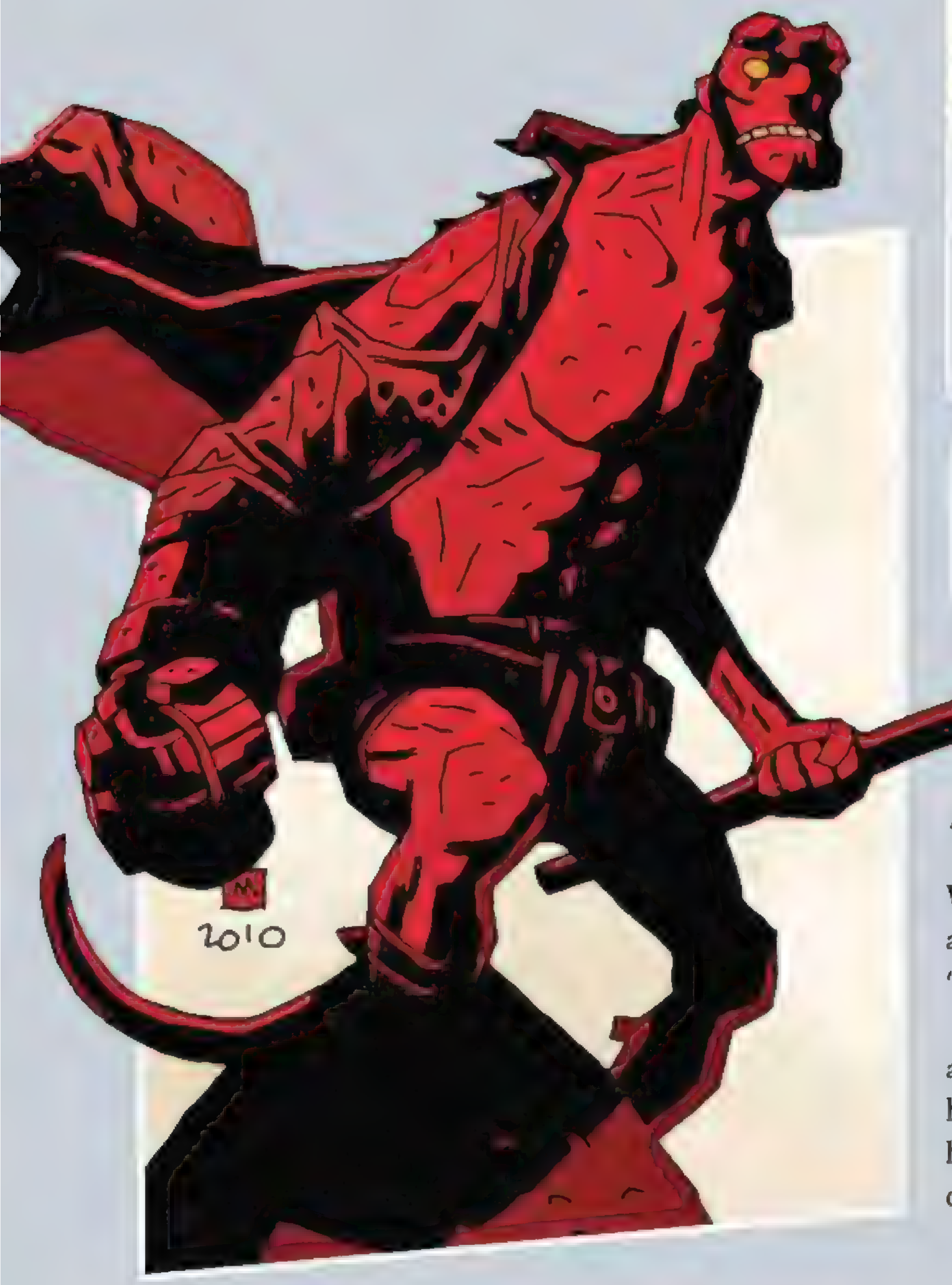
Halo Jones was conceived by Alan Moore and Ian Gibson as a deliberate contrast to the usual space warrior types. Instead, she's a stylish, relatable and very human character who just happens to live in the 50th Century. When we first meet her, she's an 18 year old punk. She later blasts off into space and we watch her grow up on her galactic adventures.

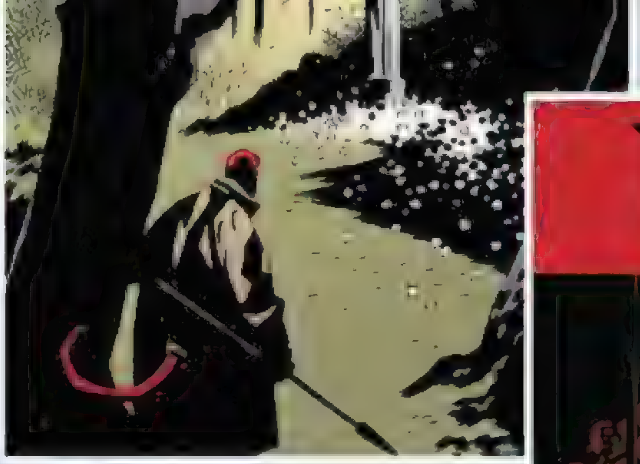
## 08



## IRON MAN

A playboy genius with a toy box to rival Hamleys – Tony Stark is the epitome of cool. Sharp, sexy, funny and not dragged down by boring things like humility, Stark makes being a superhero look like it's actually fun. He's had some hard times along the way – notably falling into alcoholism during the "Demon In A Bottle" storyline – but somehow he always bounces back to save the world. >



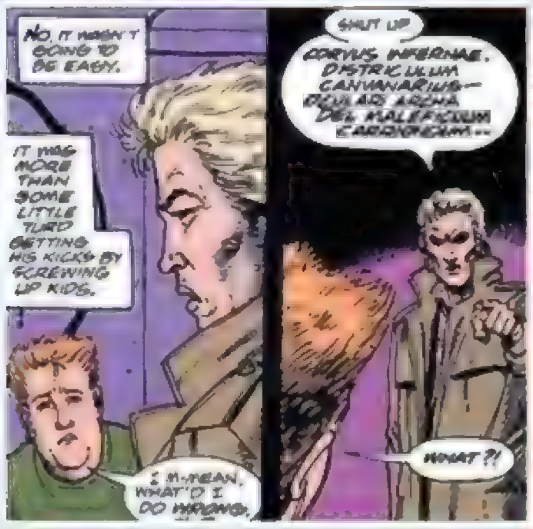


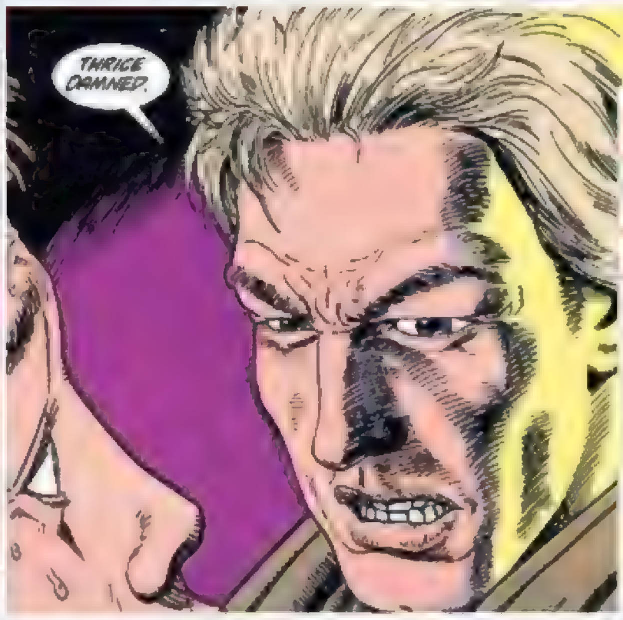
HELLBOY
THE WILD HUNT
MIKE MIGNOLA
DUNCAN FEGREDO

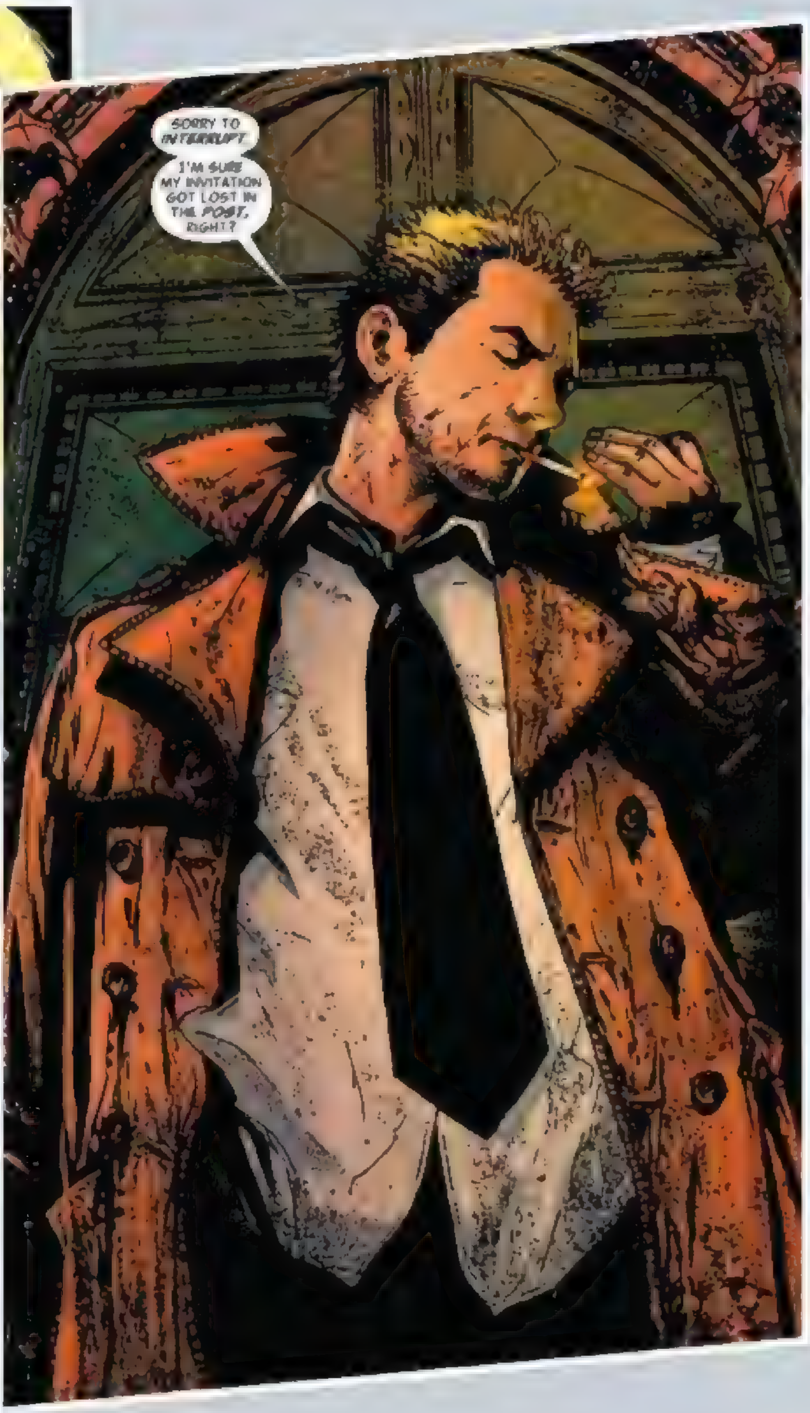
## 07 HELLBOY

What's not to love about Hellboy? A bright red demon with a fist of stone and a heart of gold, he's been battling the forces of evil since the early '90s when Mike Mignola first created the character.

Hellboy's appeal is visceral and visual – he's big, burly, smokes a cigar and beats the crap out of anything or anyone that gets in his way – but he's also an endearingly sweet figure and his decades of experience in hunting down all manner of occult nasties mean that you'd want him on your side in a bad situation.

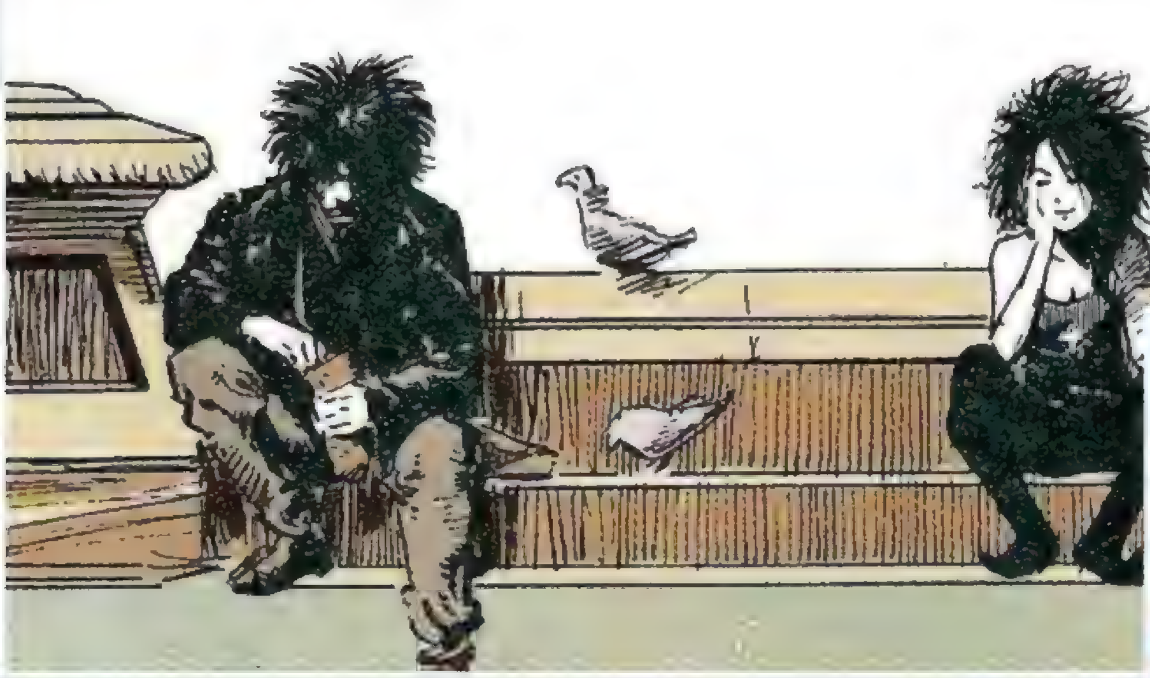

NO, IT WASN'T GOING TO BE EASY.
IT WAS MORE THAN SOME LITTLE TURD GETTING HIS KICKS BY SCREWING UP KIDS.
I M-MEAN, WHAT'D I DO WRONG?
SHUT UP
CORVUS INFERNAE. DISTRICULUM CANVANARIUS— RUULAS ARCHA DEL MALEFICIUM CARRIONAM...
WHAT?!

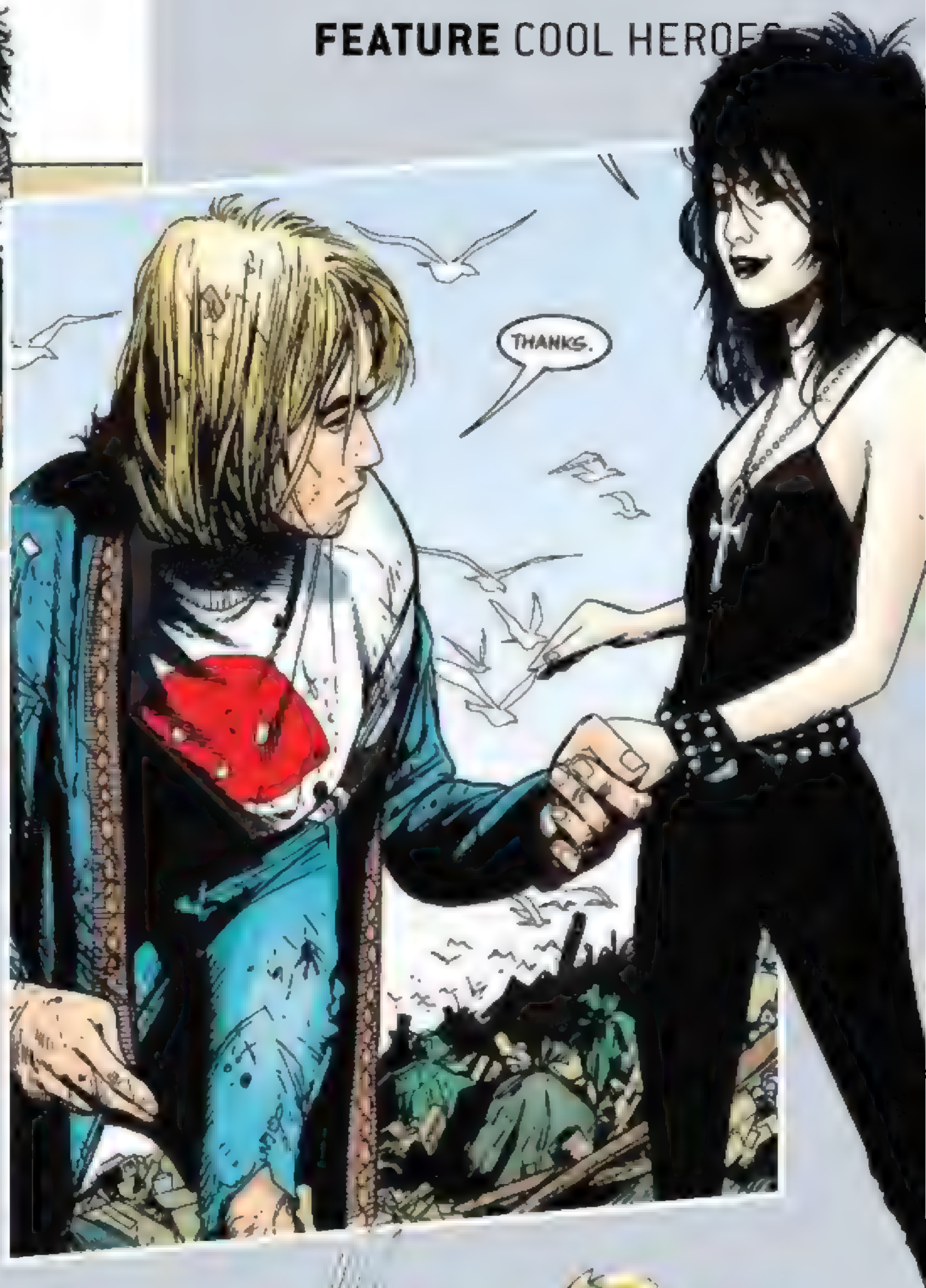

THRICE DAMNED.


SORRY TO INTERRUPT.
I'M SURE MY INVITATION GOT LOST IN THE POST, RIGHT?

## 06 JOHN CONSTANTINE

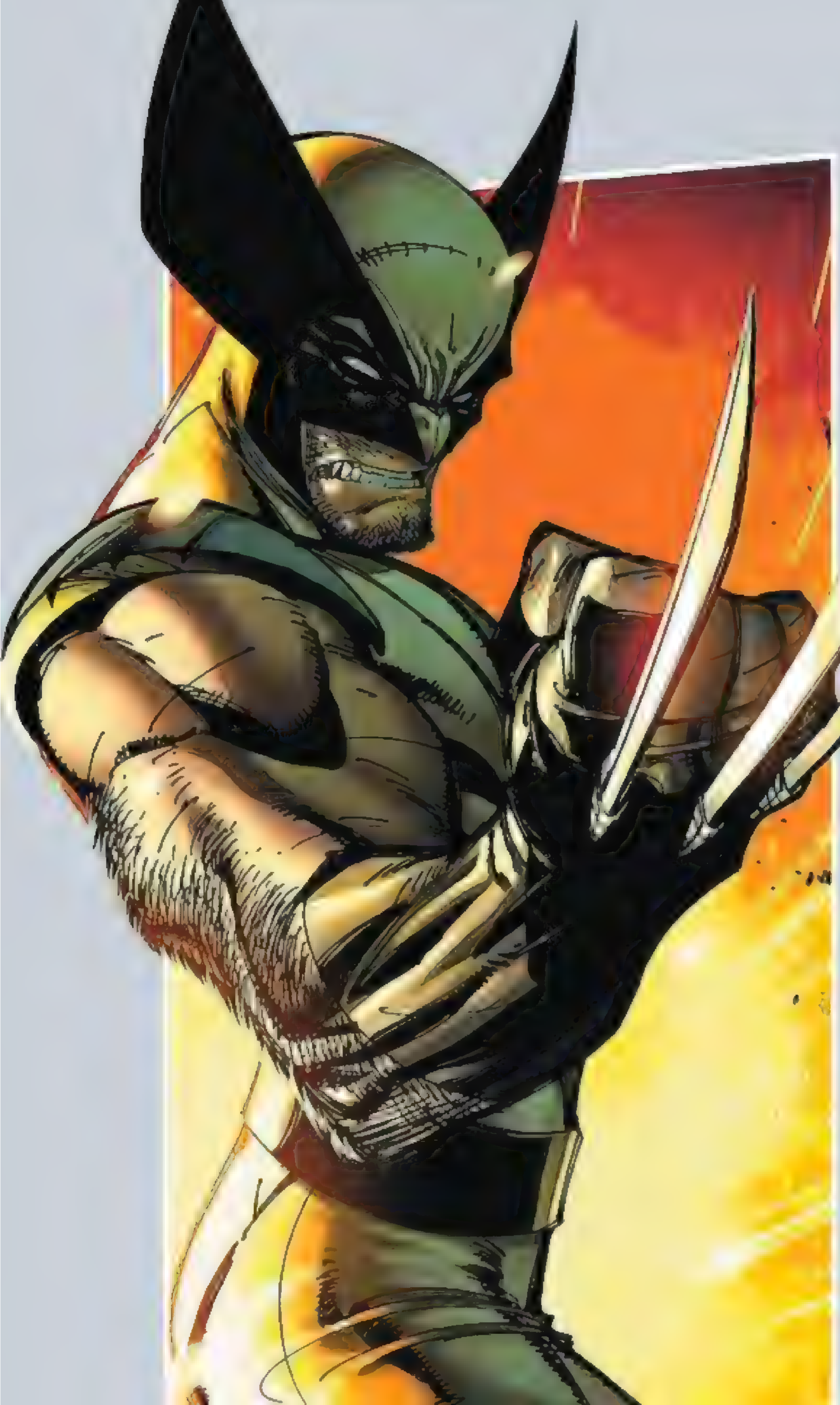
He may be better known these days for a dodgy US TV show, but John Constantine is one of the original rock stars of comics. A hard-living magician and occult detective from Liverpool he drinks, smokes and fights his way through life, encountering demonic forces and sinister conspiracies along the way. *Hellblazer* was the longest running Vertigo series, until its cancellation in 2013. That's pretty much all down to the appeal of Constantine himself. He's a working class hero who has lived through triumph and tragedy, but always has a sharp line and a sense of humour. He's part of the main DC line now, but when we cast our minds to Constantine, it's the Vertigo version we're thinking of.

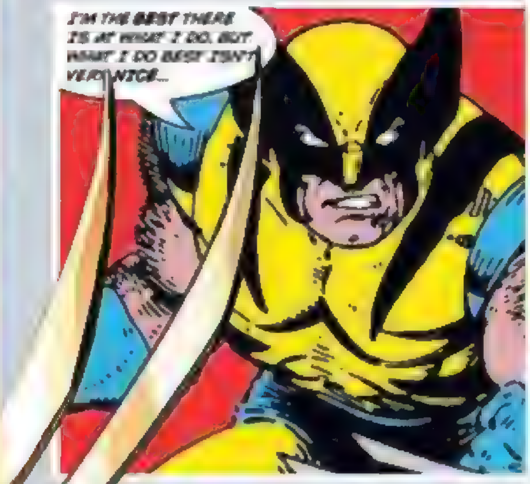


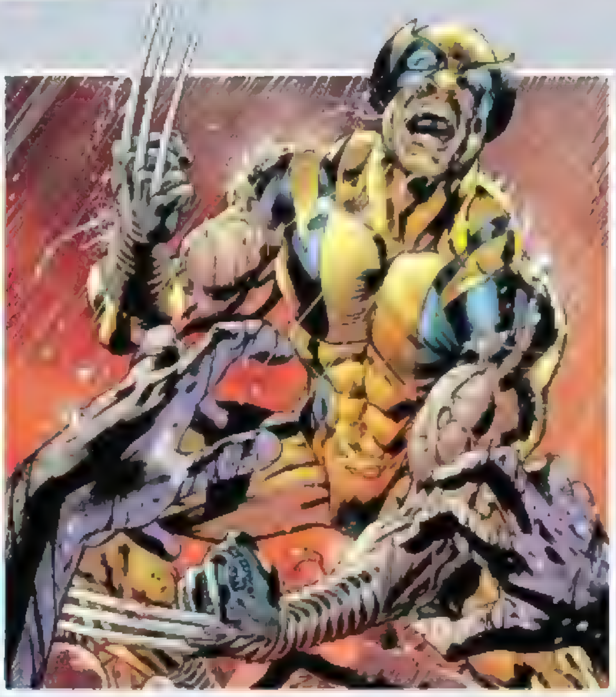


## 05 DEATH OF THE ENDLESS

If you had to meet a personification of Death, what form would you rather it took? A spooky skeletal Grim Reaper type – or a svelte, stylish goth girl? Chances are you'd choose the latter! With Death, Gaiman took a state that we'll all naturally predisposed to fear and made it a little less scary. His Death is a sweet, good-natured figure who helps the deceased on their way. The character became an instant fan favourite – and an easy cosplay character for anyone willing to splash out on an ankh necklace and a black t-shirt.

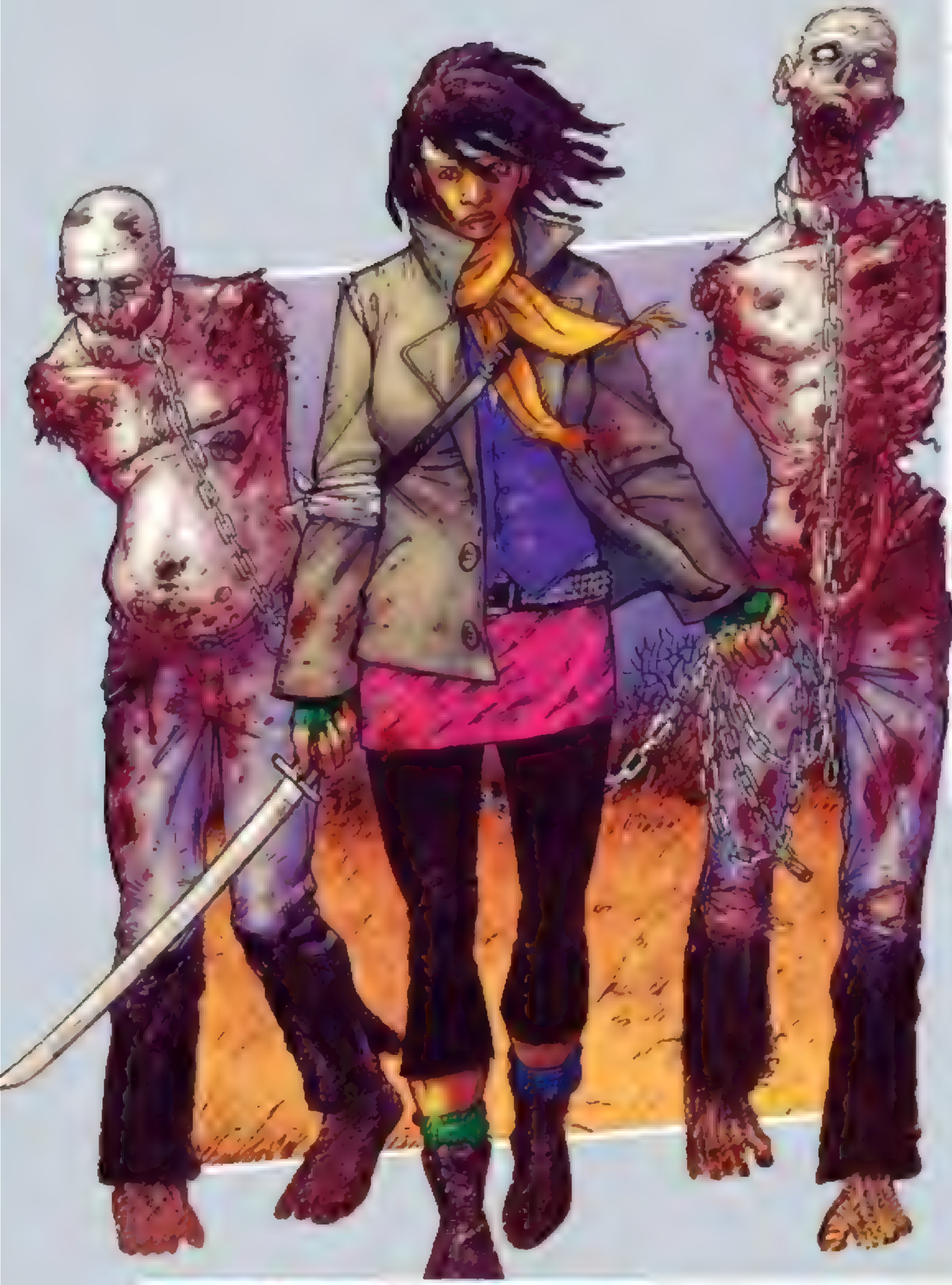


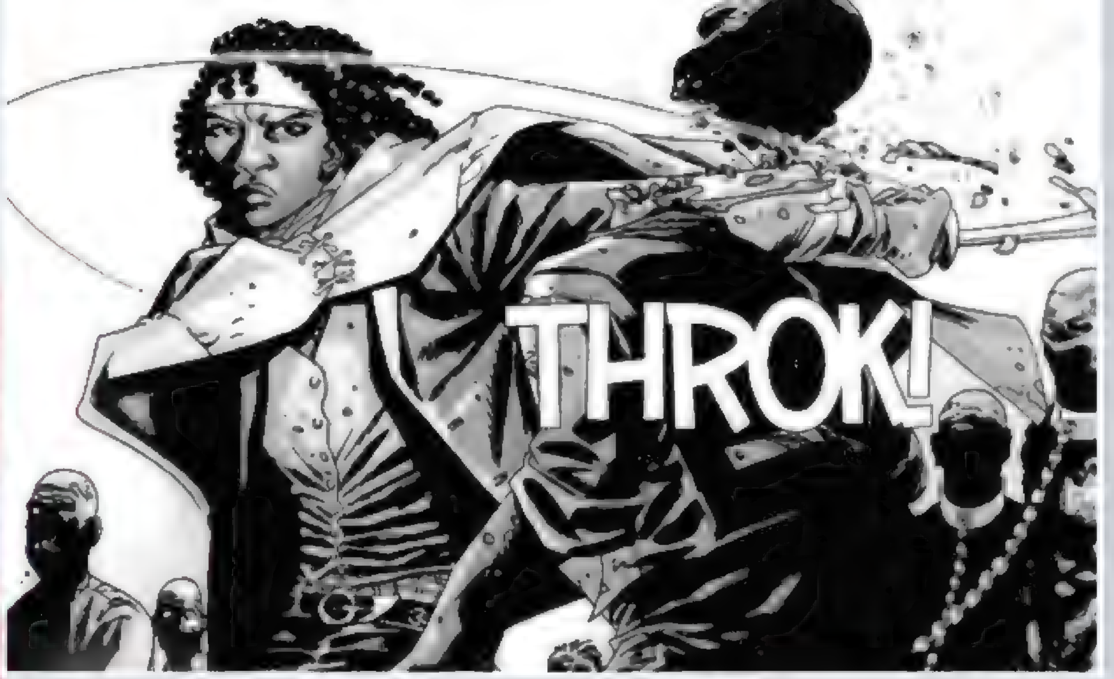

I'M THE BEST THERE IS AT WHAT I DO, BUT WHAT I DO BEST ISN'T VERY NICE...



## 04 WOLVERINE

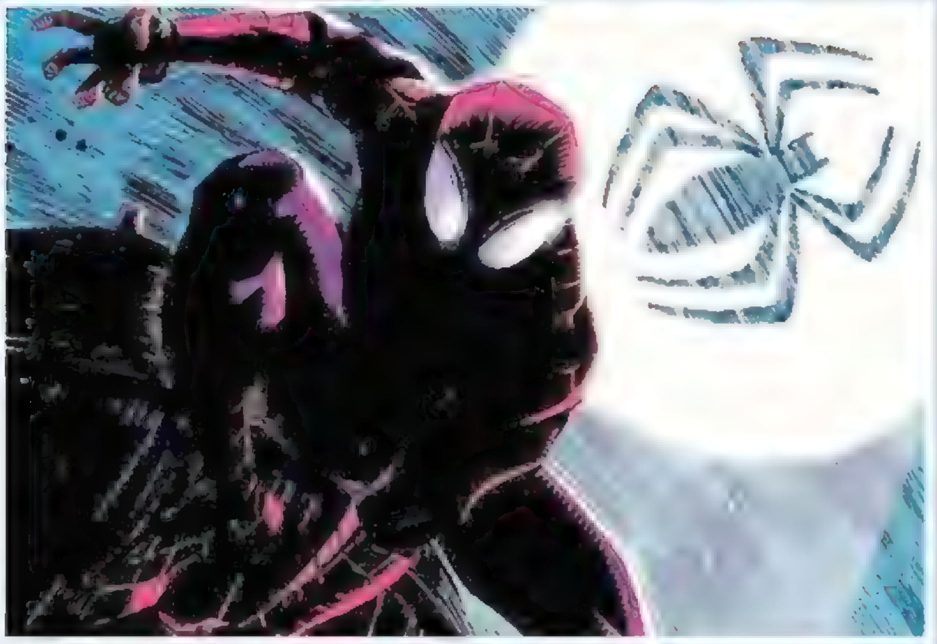
Originally introduced as a villain in *The Incredible Hulk* #180, Len Wein and John Romita, Sr's creation has had more staying power than anyone could have imagined. A scrappy short-arse with bladed "claws", he's rough, tough and seemingly indestructible – a hot-headed fighter for justice who won the hearts of superhero fans. Today, he's easily the most popular of the X-Men – due in no small part to Hugh Jackman's great performance in the movies. But he's got layers, too. The comics eked out the mystery surrounding his background for decades, and we've seen this cool Canuck at both his peak and wracked with despair. Currently Wolverine is dead. It won't stick. There's no grave that can keep this tough mother down. >

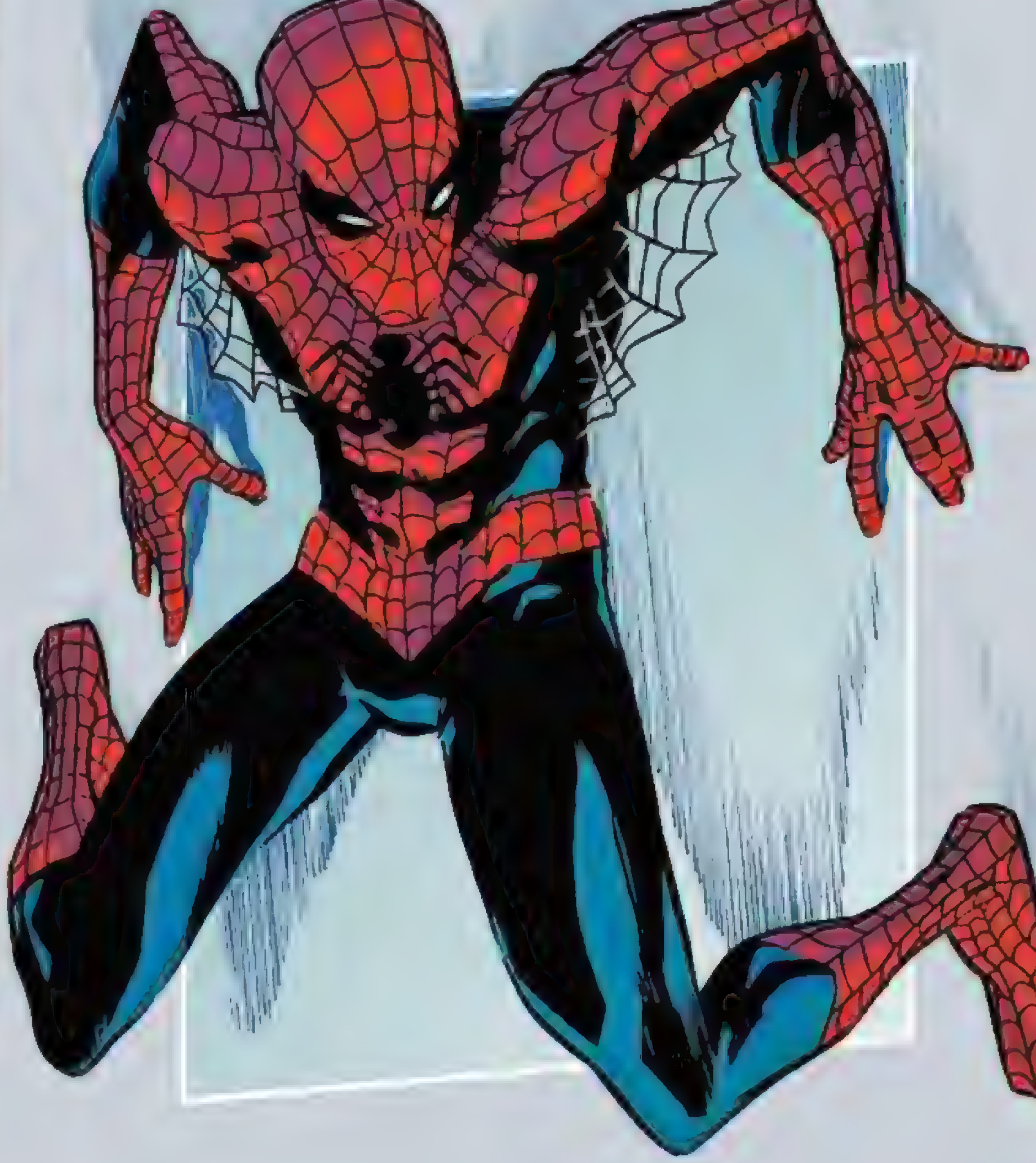




## 03 MICHONNE

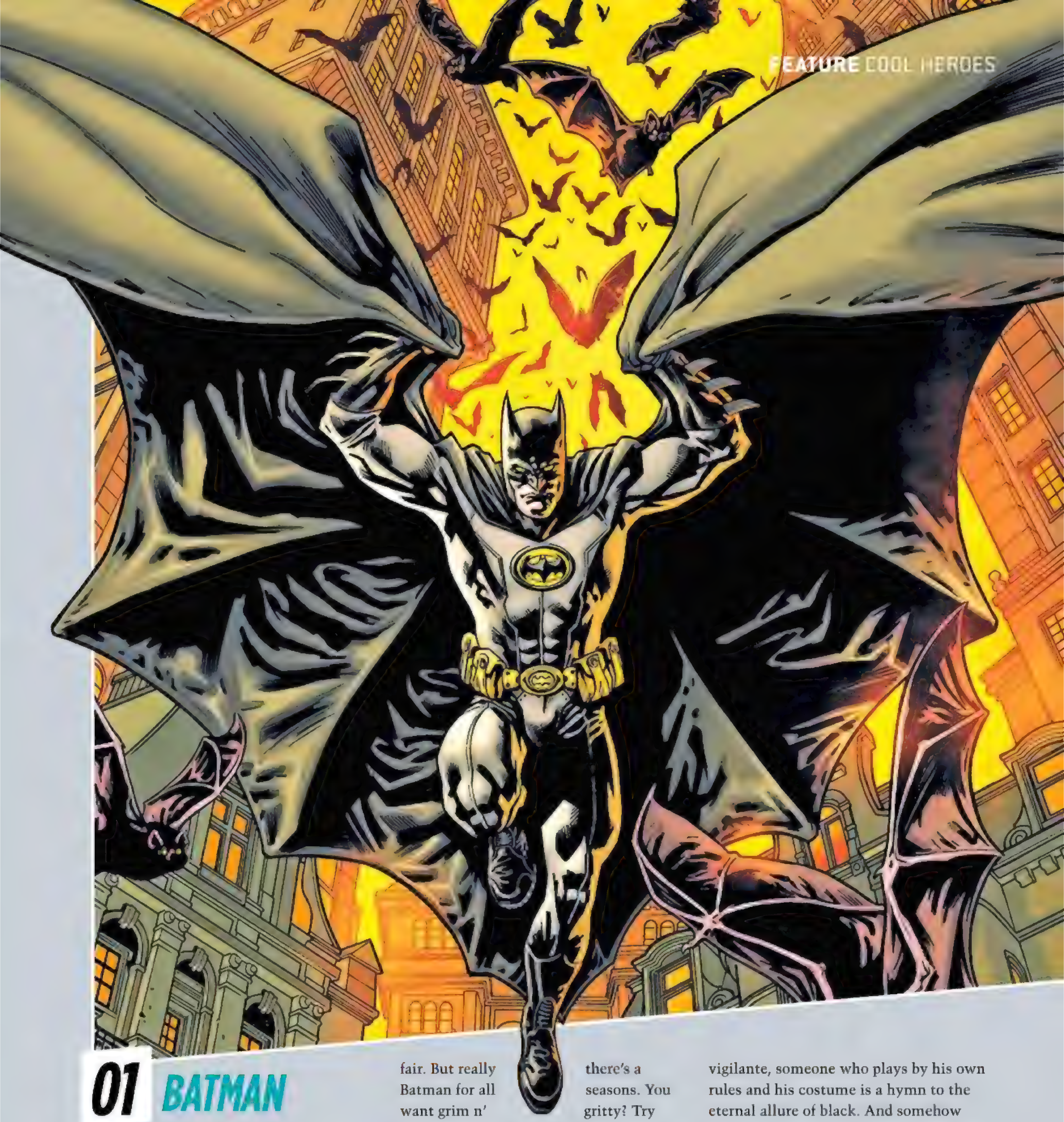
When Michonne first appeared (in *The Walking Dead* #19) she was a mysterious, monosyllabic warrior – a silent killer armed with a katana and accompanied by two armless zombie companions. For a comic that had remained relatively grounded until that point, she was a striking breath of fresh air. But Robert Kirkman and Charlie Adlard were quick to develop her into one of the most sympathetic characters in the book. As the series has progressed we've seen Michonne's unflinching loyalty to Rich Grimes, delved into her tragic past and watched her slay countless members of the undead. Then, after surviving the "All Out War" arc, they went and gave her a boat. Yep, Michonne is now a zombie-killing pirate





## 02 SPIDER-MAN

There's something about the Spider-Man outfit that changes its wearer. Peter Parker? An angsty science geek. Miles Morales? A bit of a dork. But *Spider-Man*? Now that guy's cool in every incarnation. As soon as the mask comes on the webslinger starts cracking wise and fighting crime. It's total reader wish-fulfillment, albeit with a darker side. Both Peter and Miles have faced an endless barrage of trials and traumas over the years, and have had to learn to use their powers responsibly (we won't say the line). Still, as he swings through the city streets, Spider-Man makes being a superhero look like the most fun ever.



## 01 BATMAN

He's the world's greatest detective, the Caped Crusader, the Dark Knight. He's Batman – the coolest character in all of comics. And here's why...

Bruce Wayne may be often portrayed as a vengeance-obsessed loner, and that's fair. But really there's a Batman for all seasons. You want grim n' gritty? Try Frank Miller or Brian Azzarello's work. Crazy sci-fi more your style? Then how about some of the Silver Age strips? High camp? Well, there's a great *Batman* '66 book. He's infinitely adaptable.

Still, there's no doubting that inherent darkness does give him an edge. He's a vigilante, someone who plays by his own rules and his costume is a hymn to the eternal allure of black. And somehow the fact that he's fallible, that he can be beaten and doesn't have immense powers, makes him all the better. It forces him to be two steps ahead of everyone else in the superhero game. He has the best backstory, the coolest costume and smarts to spare. And just *look* at him...

storemags

# DIZZY HEIGHTS!

**VERTIGO**, THE ORIGINAL HOME OF ADULT, CREATOR-OWNED COMICS, IS BACK WITH A NEW ROSTER OF TITLES AND SOME OF THE MOST EXCITING WRITERS AND ARTISTS IN THE BUSINESS. **JOEL MEADOWS** FINDS OUT MORE...

Ask a comic book fan to name some of the most non-superhero comics of the last 25 years and, chances are, they'll be Vertigo titles. DC's adult-focused imprint is the home to the likes of Sandman, Preacher, Y: The Last Man and Transmetropolitan, to name but a few. The imprint has been a haven for intelligent and thought-provoking comics ever since it began back in 1993. It was a springboard for [illegible] creators like Neil Gaiman, Alan Moore, Peter Milligan and Garth Ennis, but with the departure of its Executive >

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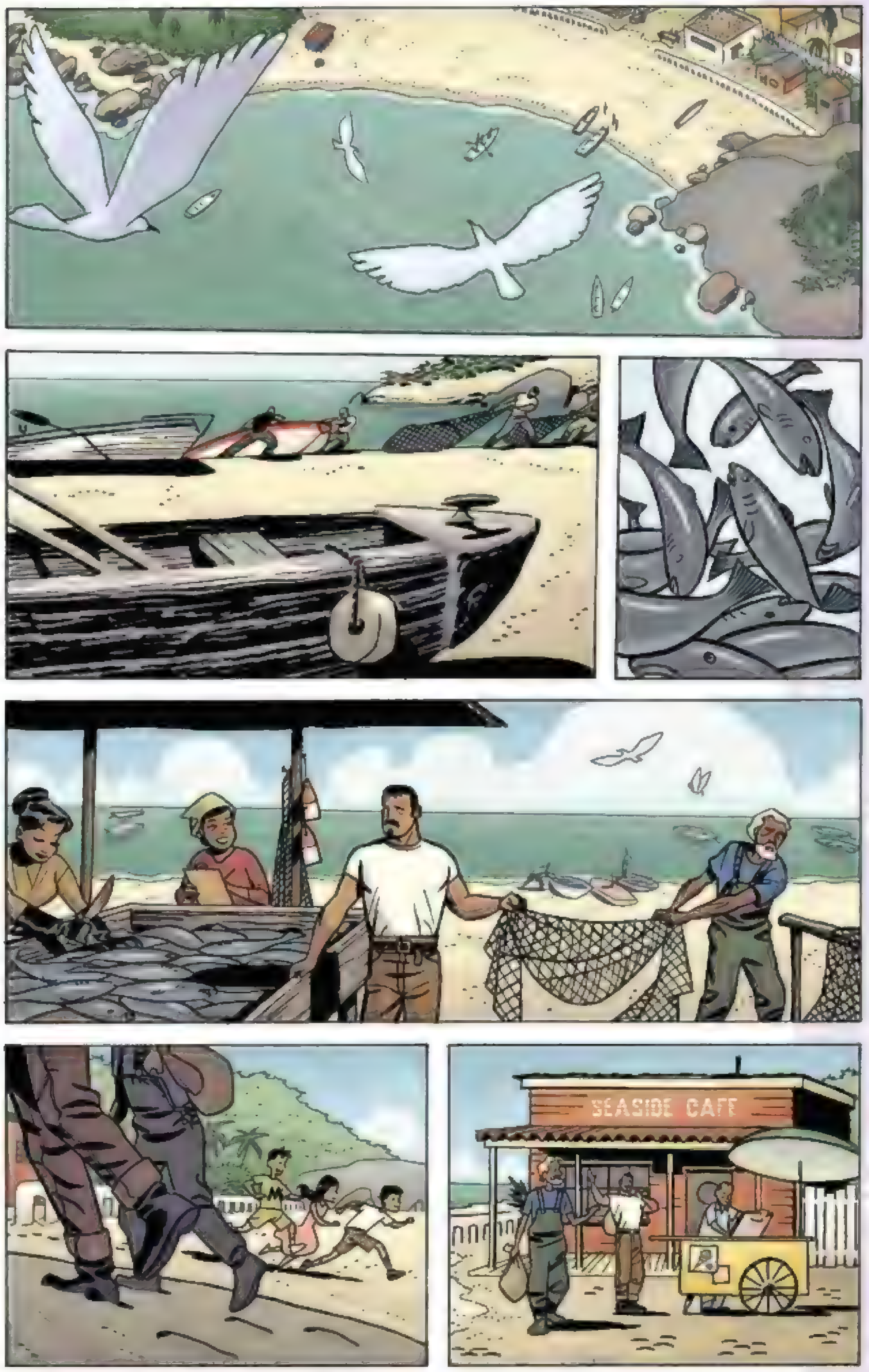
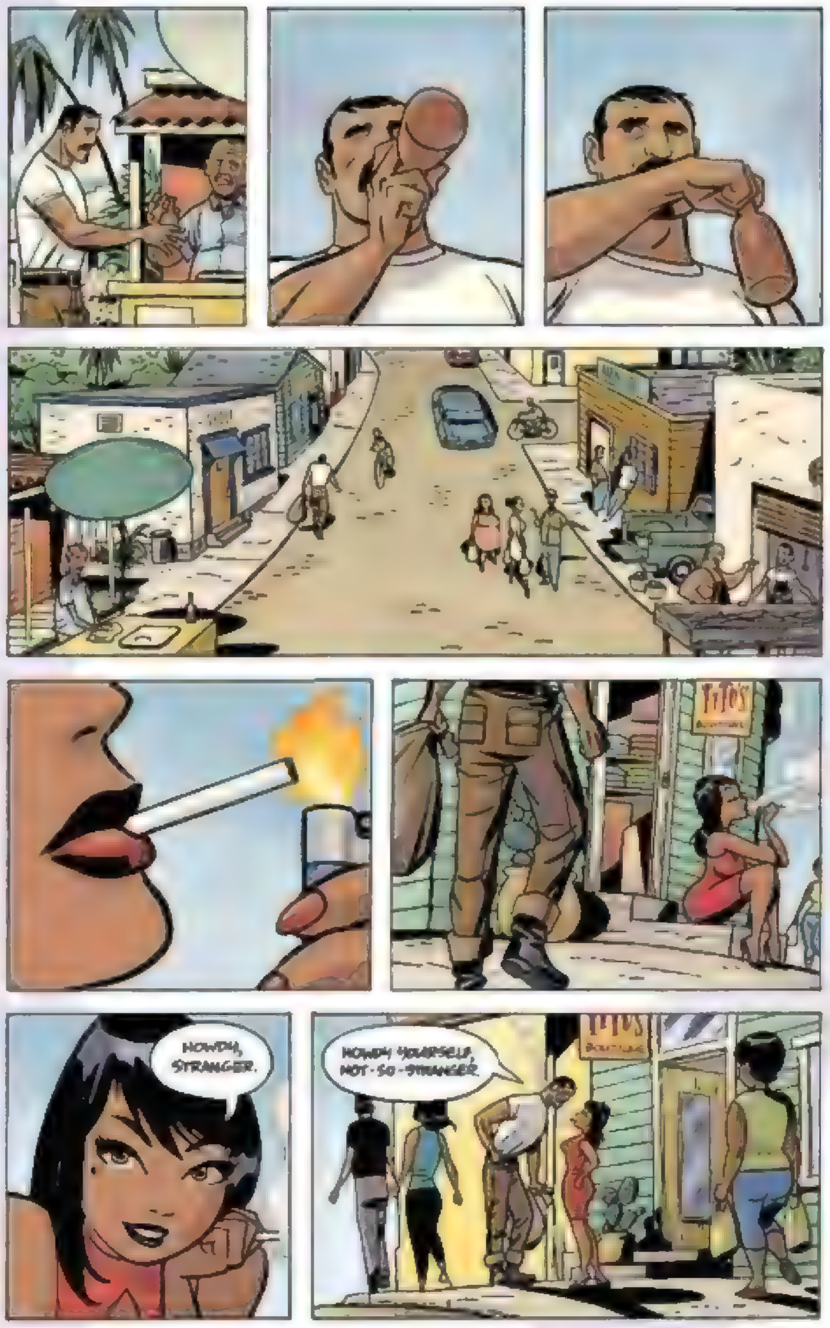



TITO'S
HOWDY, STRANGER.
HOWDY YOURSELF, NOT-SO-STRANGER.

**Above and opening page:** Renowned artist Darwyn Cooke and acclaimed writer Gilbert Hernandez team up to tell a surreal tale of strange happenings in a remote Latin American seaside village in *The Twilight Children*. How could it not be great?

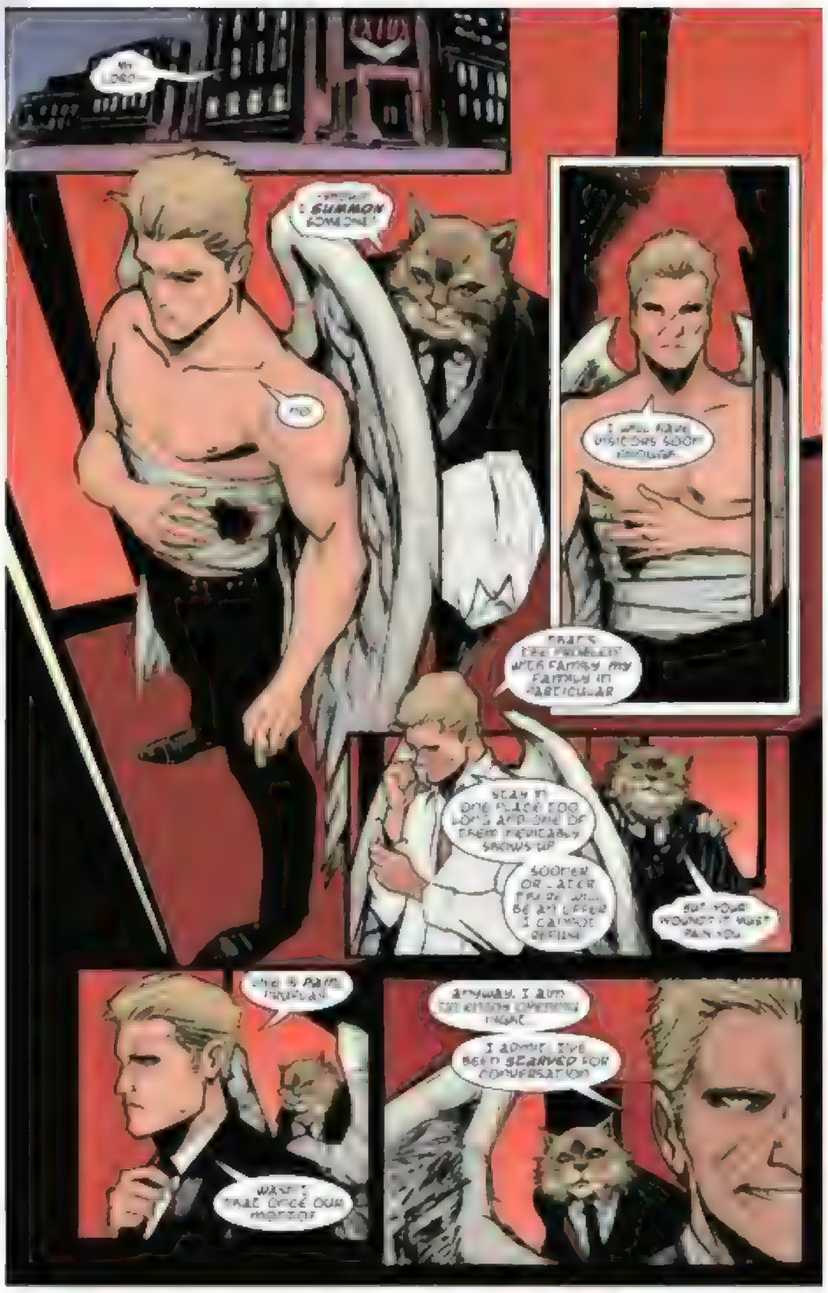
Editor Karen Berger in 2013, it seemed to flounder. Even its long-running flagship title, *Hellblazer*, came to an end that year with its hero, John Constantine, absorbed into the more kid-friendly New 52.

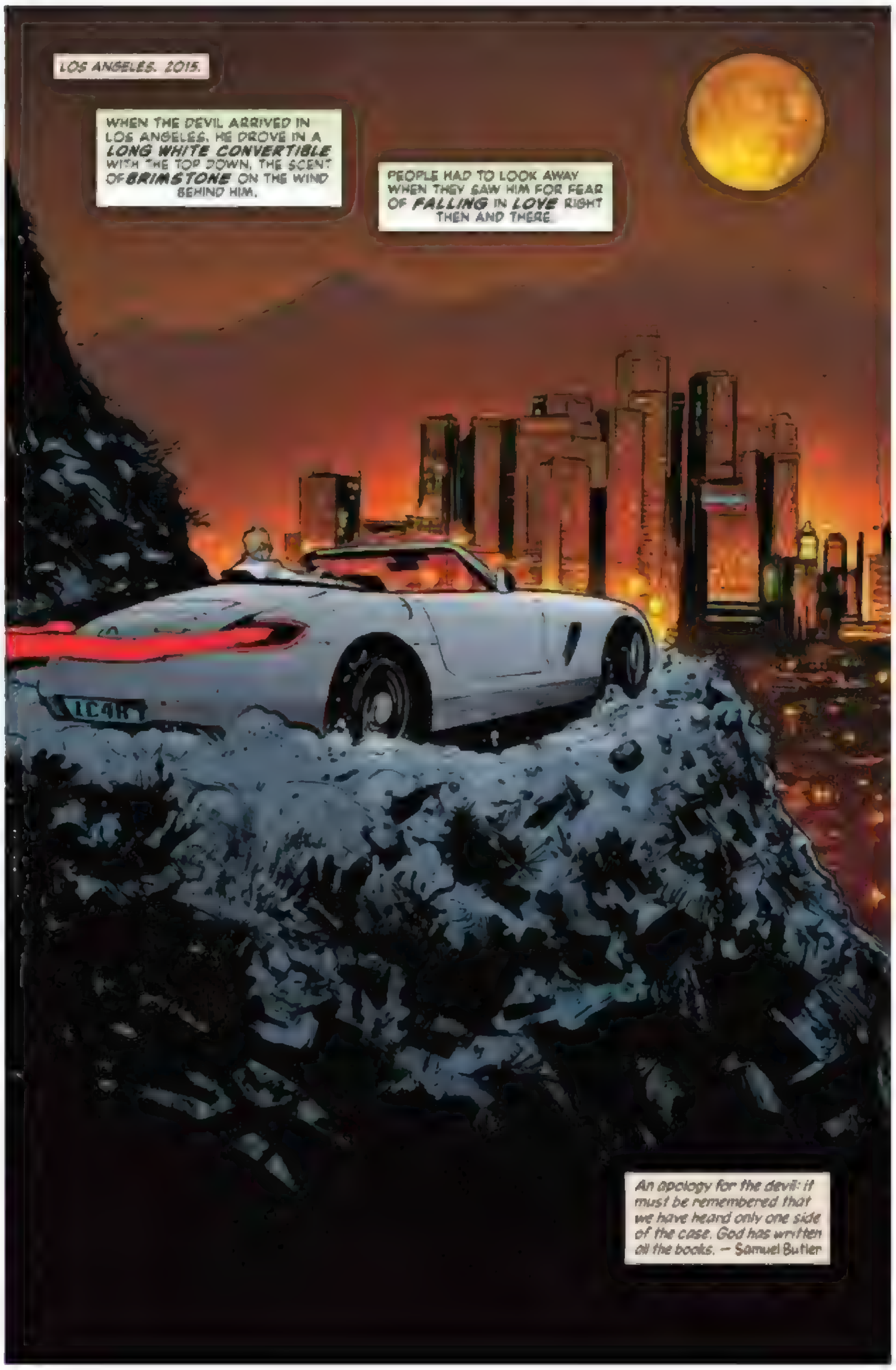
Now it's time to turn that around once again. From October, Vertigo will launch 12 new books, four a month, that aim to reinvigorate the line. They're a mix of ongoing monthlies and miniseries, and Executive Editor Shelly Bond has high hopes. "Vertigo has a long-standing tradition of uniting the most talented creators in the industry," she says. "That begins with a top-notch editorial staff. I've put together a brand new team – with editors coming from diverse publishing backgrounds – to round out Vertigo's sensibility. The result is a fearless new wave of 12 inventive titles".

Vertigo has always included a mix of established talent and new creators, and the 12 titles are no exception. Bond sees the appeal of working on a book for Vertigo to be as strong as it always was.

"There was a concerted effort to lure industry legends like Darwyn Cooke over to the dark side," she says. "He asked if Gilbert Hernandez would consider working with him. After a five-second phone call, you have the seed of *The Twilight Children* [reviewed on page 120]. Most creators come to Vertigo knowing the sensibility and [assured] that their vision will be brought to life and backed one hundred per cent. They know our history and understand that we're looking for the stories that keep them up at night."

Rob Williams is the writer on November's *Unfollow*, one of the new monthlies (reviewed on page 121). "It's an action thriller for the social media era," he explains.


MY LORD—
I SUMMON SOMEONE?
NO
THAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH FAMILY. MY FAMILY IN PARTICULAR.
I ADMIT, I'VE BEEN STARVED FOR CONVERSATION


LOS ANGELES. 2015.
WHEN THE DEVIL ARRIVED IN LOS ANGELES, HE DROVE IN A LONG WHITE CONVERTIBLE WITH THE TOP DOWN, THE SCENT OF BRIMSTONE ON THE WIND BEHIND HIM.
PEOPLE HAD TO LOOK AWAY WHEN THEY SAW HIM FOR FEAR OF FALLING IN LOVE RIGHT THEN AND THERE.
LC4R
An apology for the devil: it must be remembered that we have heard only one side of the case. God has written all the books. – Samuel Butler

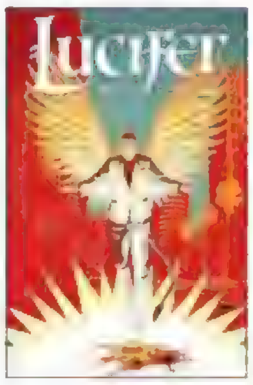
ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF DC COMICS

> **“VERTIGO'S ALWAYS FELT LIKE THE HBO OF COMIC COMPANIES”**

"The billionaire who invented our story's version of Facebook has terminal cancer, and he publicly declares that, when he dies, 140 characters from around the world will share his fortune equally. But if one of them dies, 139 will share the money. And if 139 of them were to die... then the remaining one will get all of his money."

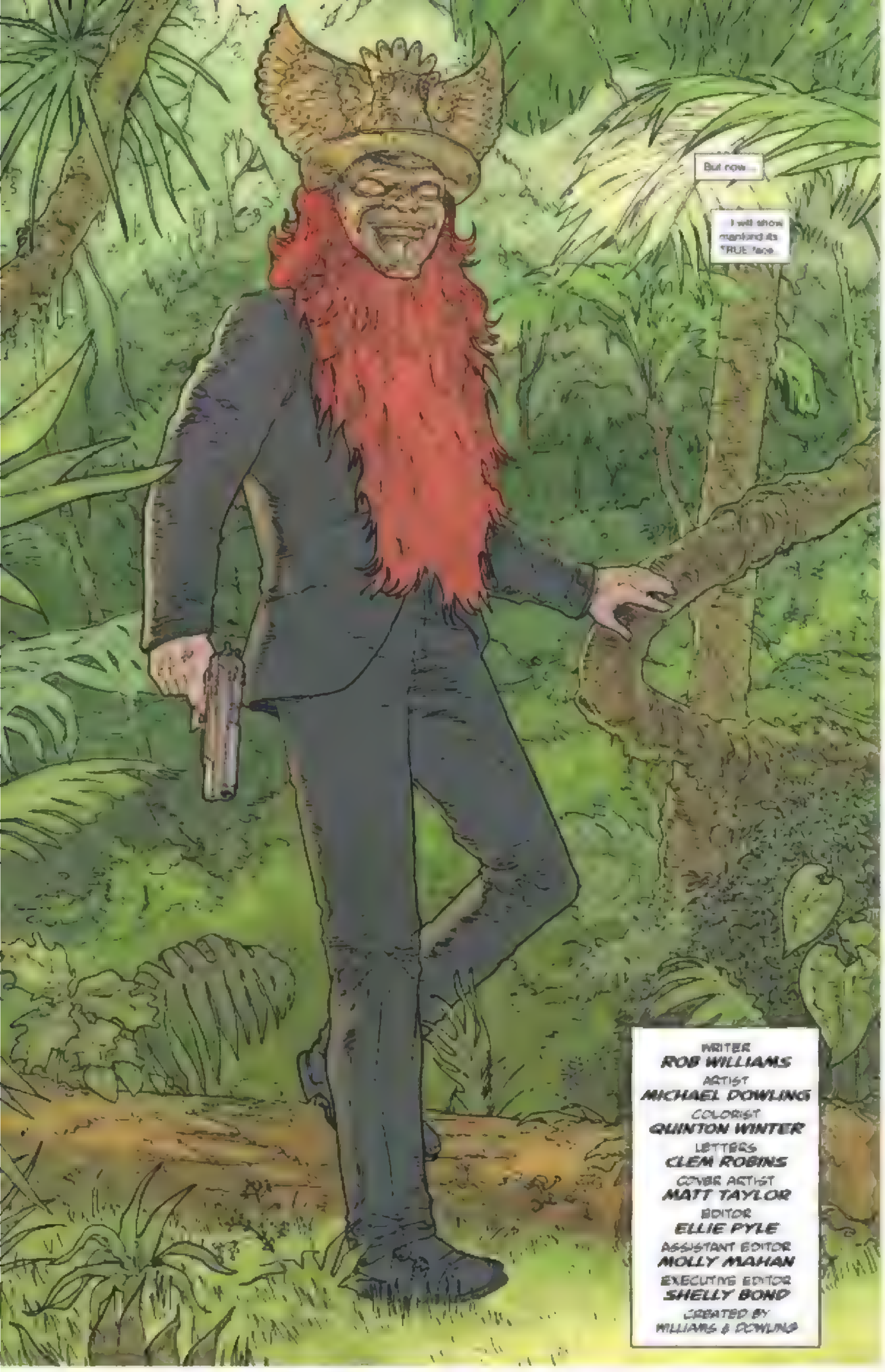
*Unfollow* isn't Williams's first project with the imprint – it picked up his miniseries *The Royals: Masters Of War* after DC closed its Wildstorm imprint – but this is the first new series he's sold to Vertigo. "It's a story about finding out who human beings really are behind the facade of technology. How we're all still part of the food chain." Is social media changing society for better or worse? "That's one of the things we're dealing with. It's supposed to make us communicate more with the world, but we all sit round the breakfast table looking at our phones rather than each other... So there's obvious contradictions. The world's changing. Opening up and closing down. My partner's always nagging me to 'put the phone down!' That's part of where *Unfollow* came from."

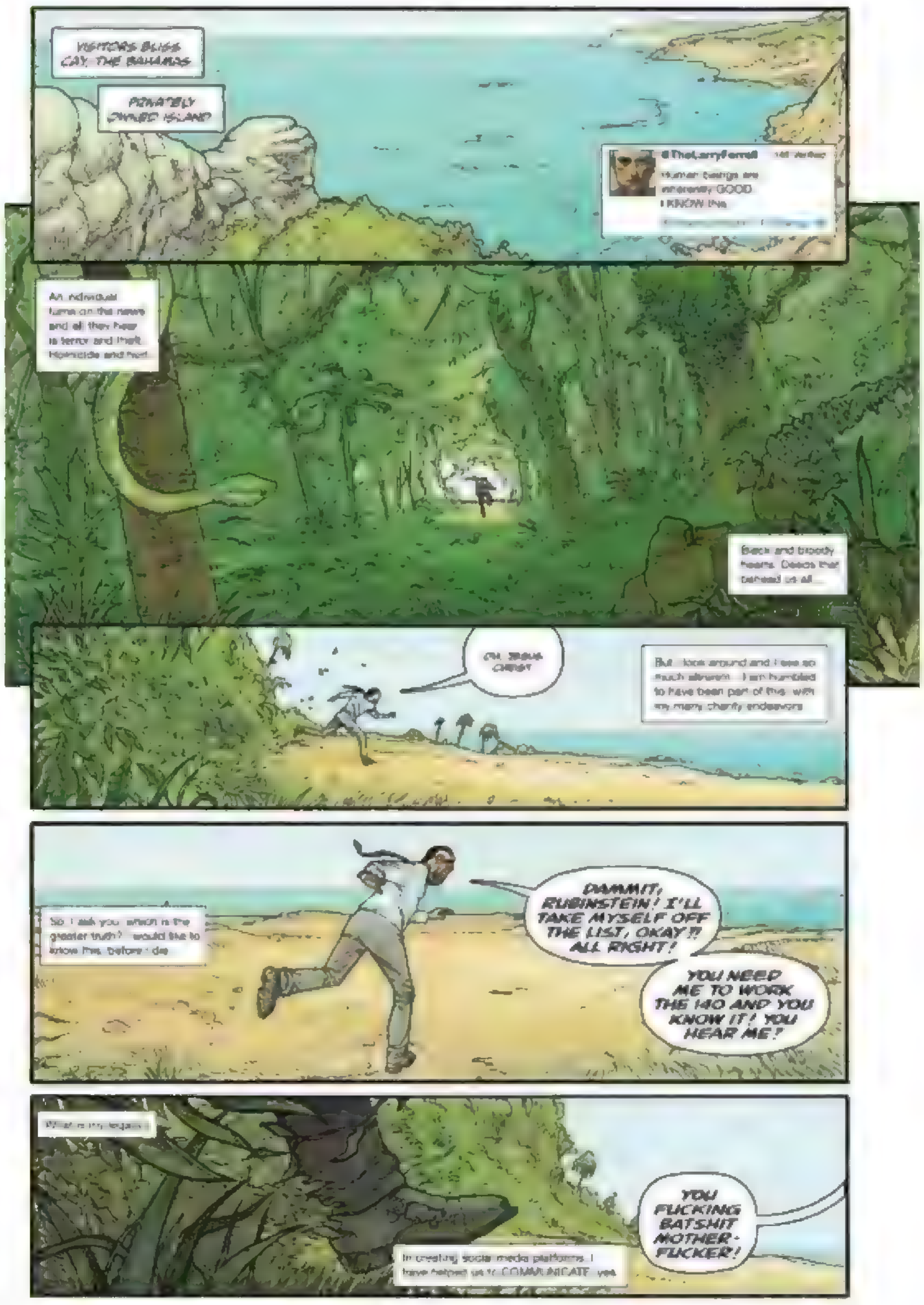
**Above and below:** Lucifer returns, now written by novelist Holly Black and drawn by British artist Lee Garbett. And when we say "returns", we mean "comes back home"



Vertigo was the natural home for the series, says Williams. "I think it's the lack of boundaries and the feeling that you can tell any story. You can go to some ambitious places with that, say some things that may shock. Vertigo has always felt like the HBO of comic companies to me, and that's still the case here. With *Unfollow* we're telling a story that really has the zeitgeist at heart.

>


But now...
I will show mankind its TRUE face.
WRITER
ROB WILLIAMS
ARTIST
MICHAEL DOWLING
COLORIST
QUINTON WINTER
LETTERS
CLEM ROBINS
COVER ARTIST
MATT TAYLOR
EDITOR
ELLIE PYLE
ASSISTANT EDITOR
MOLLY MAHAN
EXECUTIVE EDITOR
SHELLY BOND
CREATED BY
WILLIAMS & DOWLING


VISITORS BLISS CAY, THE BAHAMAS
PRIVATELY OWNED ISLAND
@TheLarryFerrell
Human beings are inherently GOOD. I KNOW this.
An individual turns on the news and all they hear is terror and theft. Homicide and hurt.
Black and bloody hearts. Deeds that behead us all...
OH, JESUS CHRIST
But I look around and I see so much altruism. I am humbled to have been part of this, with my many charity endeavors.
So I ask you: which is the greater truth? I would like to know this, before I die.
DAMMIT, RUBINSTEIN! I'LL TAKE MYSELF OFF THE LIST, OKAY?! ALL RIGHT!
YOU NEED ME TO WORK THE 140 AND YOU KNOW IT! YOU HEAR ME?
What is my legacy?
YOU FUCKING BATSHIT MOTHER-FUCKER!
In creating social media platforms, I have helped us to COMMUNICATE, yes.

And it looks incredible thanks to the art of Mike Dowling and the colours of Quinton Winter."

## CHANGING, MAN

"I think because Vertigo has been around for a few years it's easy to lose sight of how extraordinary and wonderful a thing it is," says Peter Milligan, who made his name at Vertigo with books like *Enigma* and *Shade: The Changing Man*. "Nothing stays the same, and Vertigo may be going through some changes, but it's still a place where I feel comfortable and inspired."

Milligan was one of the British writers who established Vertigo's distinctive tone and has worked on Vertigo titles on and off ever since, most recently his "*Kill Bill* meets *The Wolf of Wall Street*" tale, *The Names*. "In an industry that's often male-dominated, the powerful female presence in Vertigo has also always been one of its strengths," he says. "With my latest story, *New Romancer*, the input of some of the younger female editorial staff has been invaluable for what is a story with a young female protagonist."

*New Romancer* explores many of the familiar themes that Milligan has made his stock-in-trade as a writer. "It's the story of a young woman who meets the man of her dreams and realises you should be careful what you pray for. *New Romancer* is a supernatural romance set in and around a struggling dating start-up – New Romancer – in Silicon Valley. Our hero, Lexy, is a young and brilliant female coder. Through a mix of weird science – utilizing coding developed by Byron's genius daughter, Ada Lovelace – and weirder weather, Lexy is united with the British romantic poet Lord Byron. But Byron isn't quite what she imagined he'd be. Casanova and other demon lovers begin to show up with their own wicked agendas and what could have been a sweet love story spins off into something crazier and more twisted..."

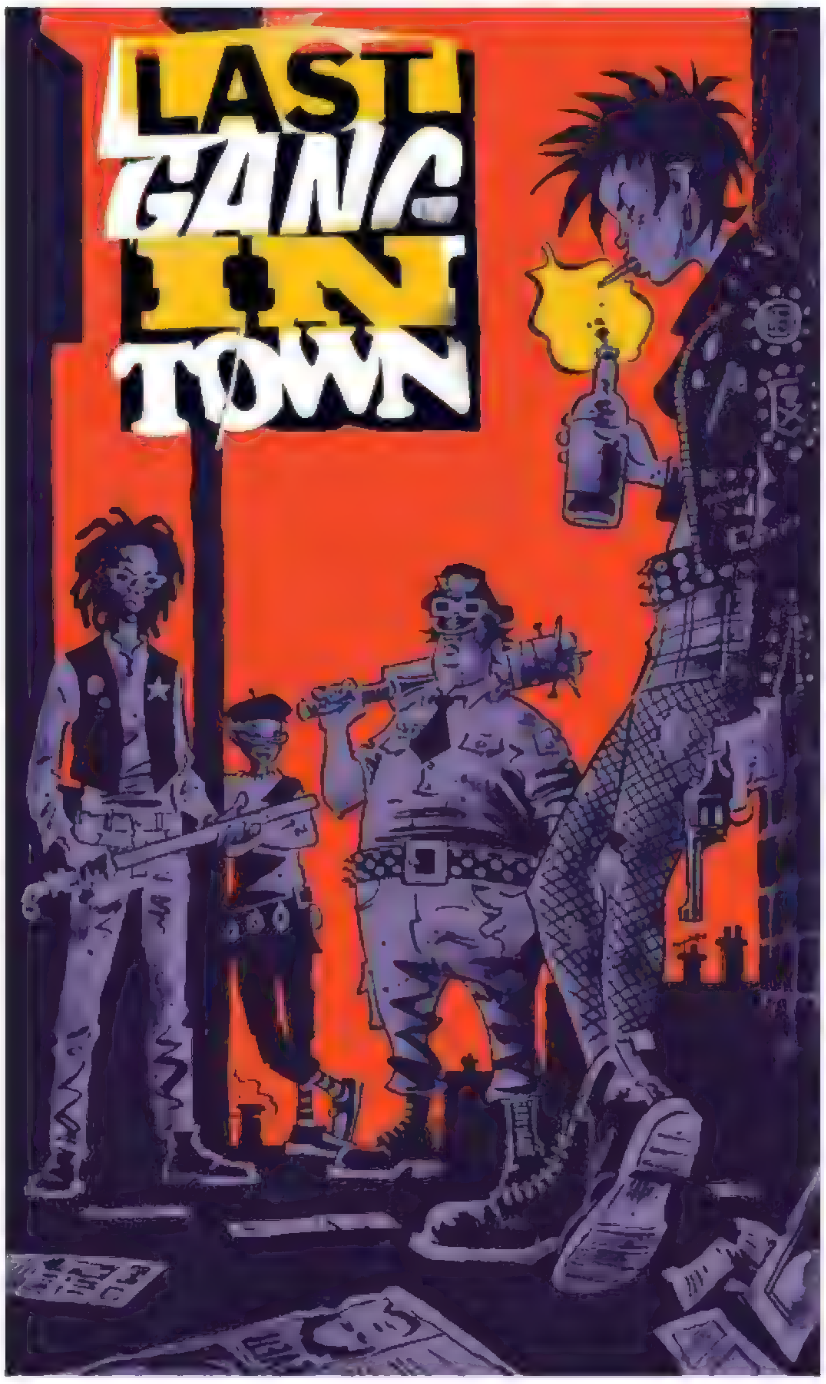
unfollow
140

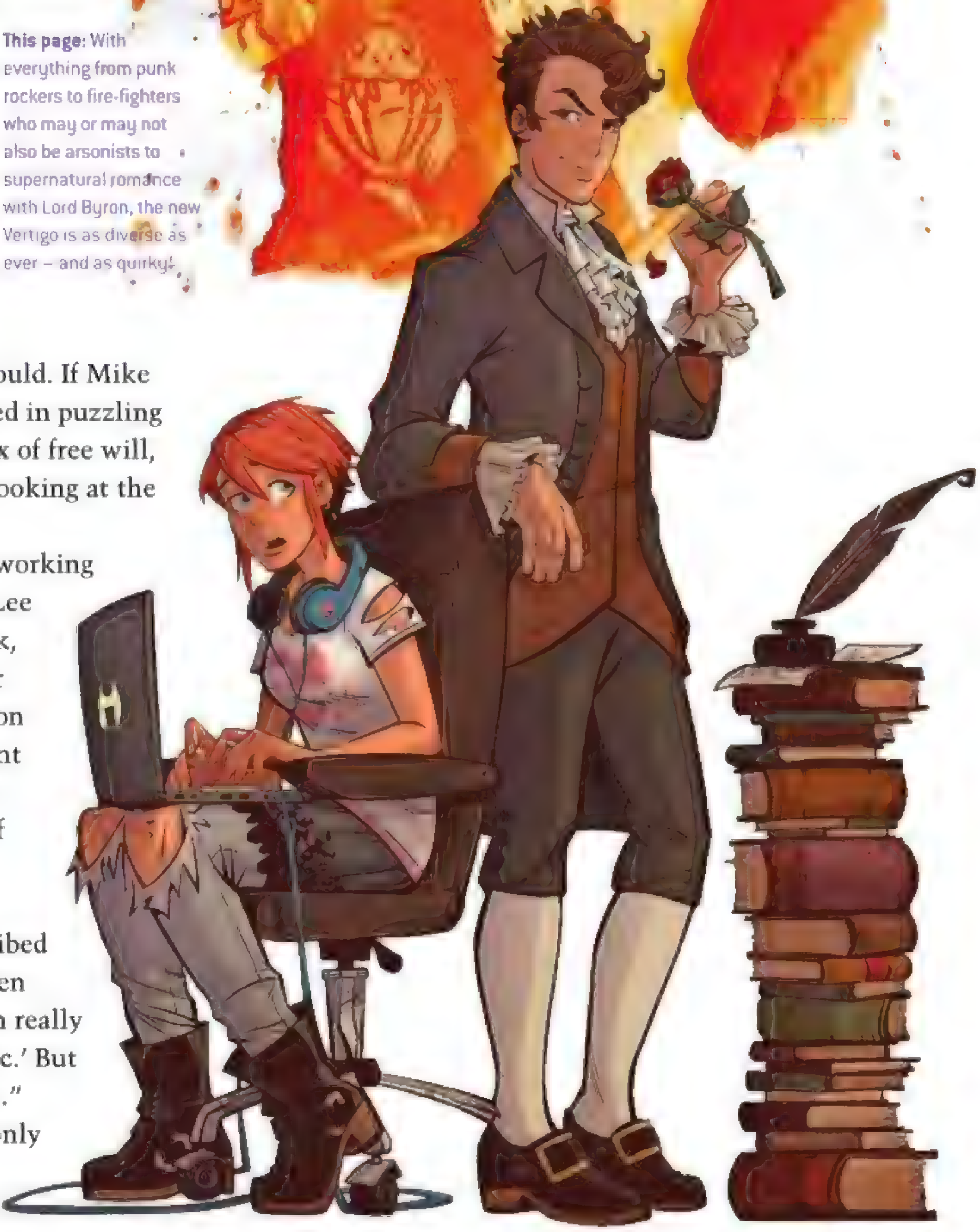
**Above:** So you think the world of social media is dangerous? In Rob Williams and Mike Dowling's *Unfollow*, it becomes really cut-throat. No, *really*... as in literally.

*New Romancer* is drawn by the relatively new artist Brett Parson. "Brett is hugely talented and I'm sure a star of the future," says Milligan. "His work on this book is remarkable."

## THE MAGIC OF BOOKS

It's not just new series, however. We can also look forward to the





**This page:** With everything from punk rockers to fire-fighters who may or may not also be arsonists to supernatural romance with Lord Byron, the new Vertigo is as diverse as ever – and as quirky!

return of a long-running mainstay, *Lucifer*, which ran under Mike Carey and Peter Gross for over six years. But the new *Lucifer* series, written by novelist Holly Black, is a different beast from its predecessor, as she emphasises: "I am trying not to contradict what's come before in any significant way, but obviously this will be a new *Lucifer* by virtue of the fact that I am a new person writing him. The challenge was to find a new storyline that would still be respectful to the canon.

"I guess the core differences are that if Mike Carey's *Lucifer* was about growing up and moving away from home and parental authority, then this *Lucifer* is about coming back home and being drawn into old conflicts (and repeating old patterns) no matter how much you swore you never would. If Mike Carey was interested in puzzling through the paradox of free will, I am interested in looking at the paradox of evil."

Black has been working with British artist Lee Garbett on the book, who has worked for DC on *Batgirl* and on a number of different series for *2000 AD*. She is very proud of the results. "He's amazing. I fully confess that I described some things and then thought 'no one can really draw this in a comic.' But he could and he did."

Black isn't the only novelist that >

Vertigo has attracted for the new slate. Lauren Beukes, the author of *The Shining Girls*, had form with Vertigo (she wrote an arc for *Fables* spin-off *Fairest*) but *The Survivors' Club*, co-written with video game journalist Dave Haverson, is altogether more ambitious.

"*Survivors' Club* came out of a very simple idea," say Beukes. "What if the '80s horror movies were real? And where are those kids today?"

"I was re-watching *Child's Play* and wondering what happened to the protagonist after the credits rolled," adds Haverson. "Because that would scar you for life!"

"The story follows six characters who all survived some horrifying events in 1987," adds Beukes, "from killer video games to sexy cannibal neighbours. Now Chenzira has brought them all together to confront an old evil that has resurfaced. We're playing off all the major horror tropes and subverting them, twisting them around in ways you hopefully haven't seen before. It's *Scooby Doo* by way of Junji Ito," she explains.

"We're both big horror fans, and working together on this is like creepy playtime," Haverson told us.

## THE NEW SLATE

### OCTOBER

**The Twilight Children #1** (Gilbert Hernandez, Darwyn Cooke)

**Survivors' Club #1** (Lauren Beukes, Dale Halvorsen, Ryan Kelly)

**Clean Room #1** (Gail Simone, Jon Davis-Hunt)

**Art Ops #1** (Shaun Simon, Michael Allred)

### NOVEMBER

**Unfollow #1** (Rob Williams, Mike Dowling)

**Slash & Burn #1** (Si Spencer, Max Dunbar, Ande Parks)

**Red Thorn #1** (David Baillie, Meghan Hetrick)

**Jacked #1** (Eric Kripke, John Higgins)

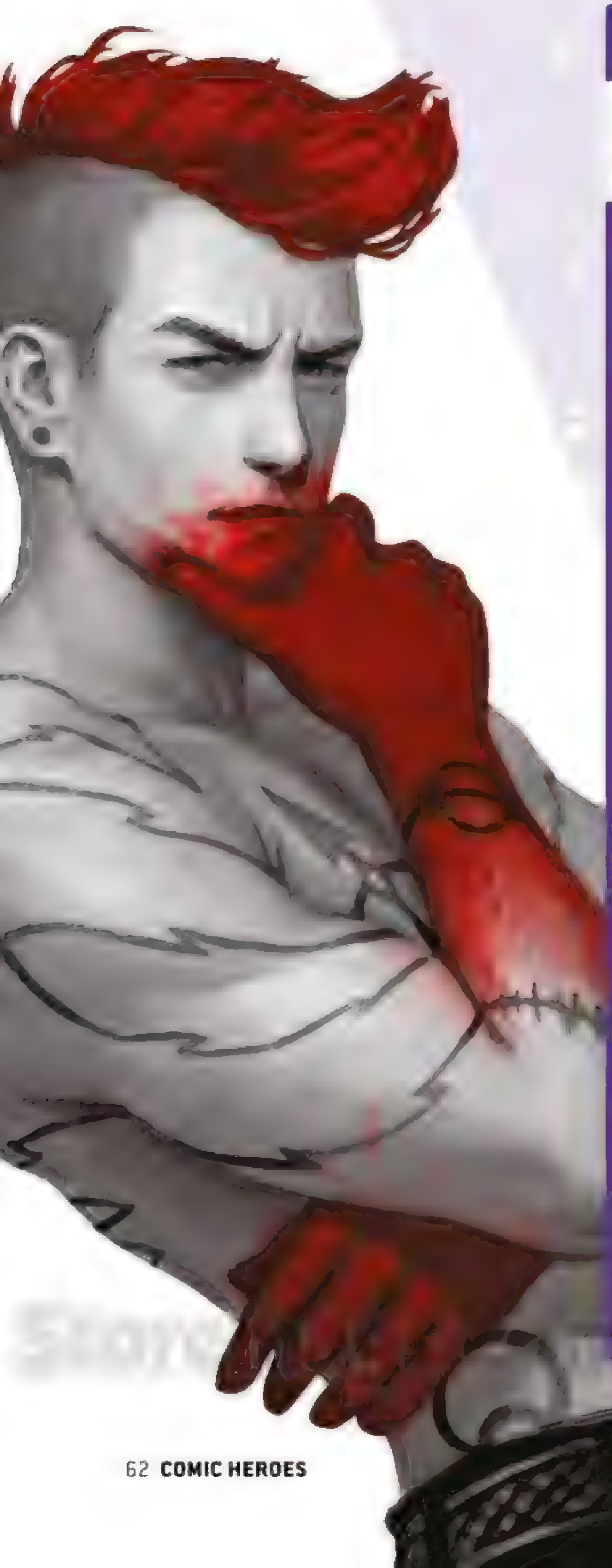
### DECEMBER

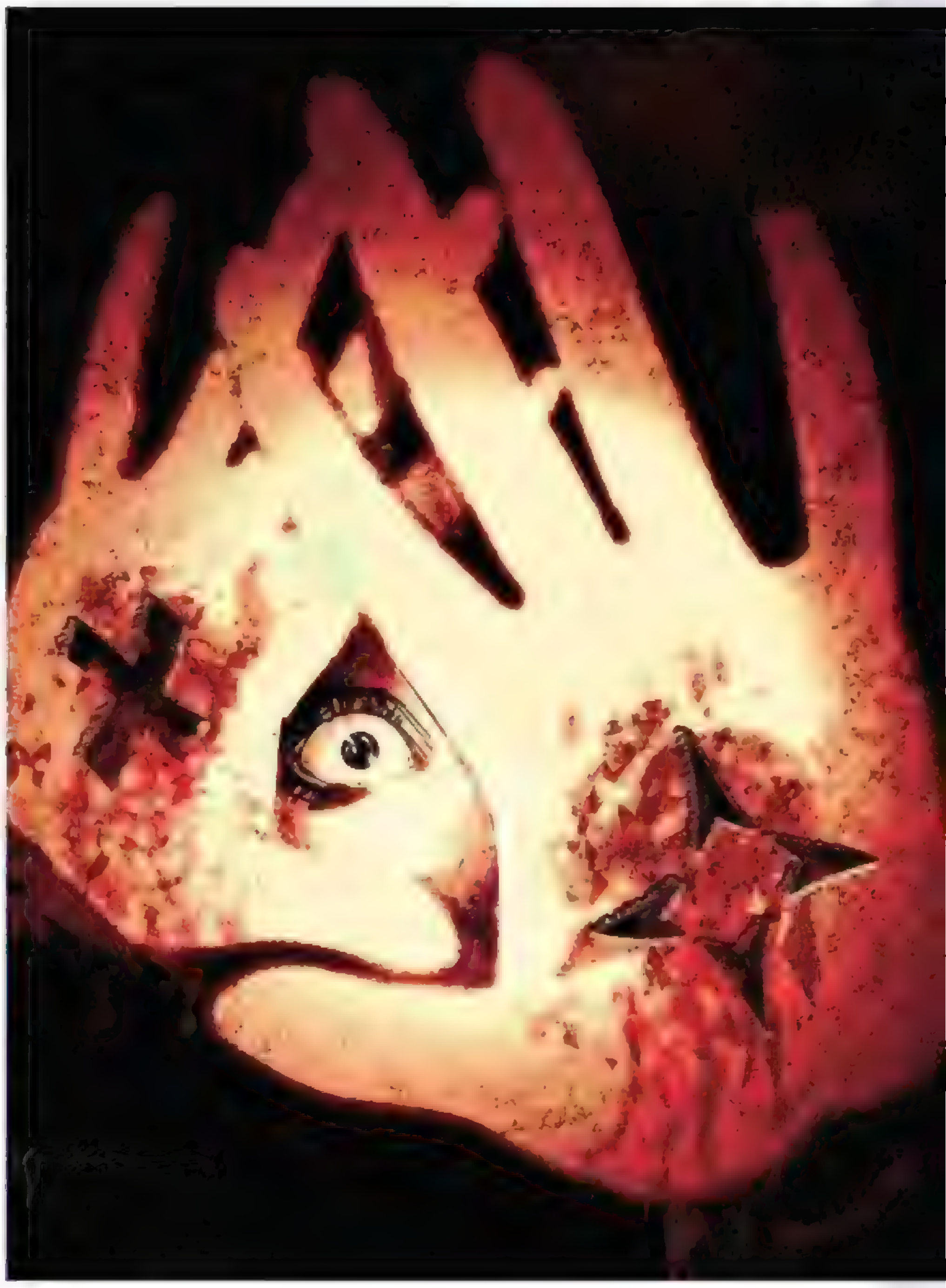
**The Sheriff of Babylon #1** (Tom King, Mitch Gerads)

**New Romancer #1** (Peter Milligan, Brett Parson)

**Lucifer #1** (Holly Black, Lee Garbett)

**Last Gang In Town #1** (Simon Oliver, Rufus Dayglo)





**Left:** Norse mythology? Old hat. In *Red Thorn*, dark Scottish fables burst violently into the modern world.

**Above:** You think the horror ends when you've survived being possessed or escape a haunted house? Not in *Survivors' Club*

**Facing page:** With great power comes... no relief from your midlife crisis *Jacked* is a very Vertigo take on super-powers.

Beukes thought Vertigo was a natural home for the series. "It's my first original comic series. I wrote a six issue arc of *Fairest*, which is exactly why I brought this project to Shelly Bond. She's a very canny – or uncanny! – editor who has an amazing vision for how the story fits together and pushes all of us to do our best work. Vertigo's the home of some of our favourite foundational comics from *Sandman* to *V For Vendetta*, *Lucifer* and *Hellblazer* and more recent kickass books like *Sweet Tooth*, *Deadenders*, *100%* and *Unwritten*."

In terms of newer talent, David Baillie, a British writer who has worked on *2000 AD*, is also part of the new launches. His series *Red Thorn* mixes up Scottish

myths with modern culture. "*Red Thorn* is a story set in modern-day Glasgow and mines Scottish mythology and pop culture to find the raw materials for a sexy, bloody story that pushes all of its characters to their limits.

"Isla is our viewpoint character for the first arc. She's a young American woman with Scottish ancestry, who's in Glasgow to investigate a dark secret from her family's past. She also has an unusual ability: when she draws people they sometimes come to life. Throw into the mix the fact she's started sketching Thorn, an almost permanently furious and nude demi-god who's been imprisoned beneath the streets of Glasgow for the last sixteen hundred years... It's my attempt at putting a very modern spin on classic Vertigo territory. And it looks gorgeous – Meghan is probably the best new comic artist in the western world. And the covers by Choong Yoon are absolutely brilliant."

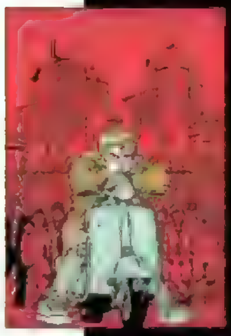
## VERTIGO VISIONS

After a relatively low-key couple of years, Vertigo has very ambitious plans to increase its visibility once again. For Shelly Bond, this move is fully in keeping with the history of DC's bold imprint.

"Launching 12 new number-one comics in three months is an audacious move, but if you look at our history, look at series like *The Sandman*, *Fables*, *Preacher* and *100 Bullets*, we're known for going the distance. And believe me, this is only the beginning..."

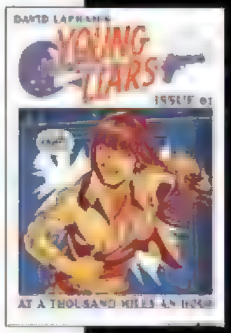
## 5 UNDERRATED VERTIGO BOOKS

**Yeah, yeah – you know all the big Vertigo books, but what about the smaller titles that Vertigo has put out over the last few decades? For every *Sandman* or *Preacher*, there's been a handful of *Vinyl Undergrounds* or *Greek Streets*. But, Will Salmon asks, which were the standouts?**

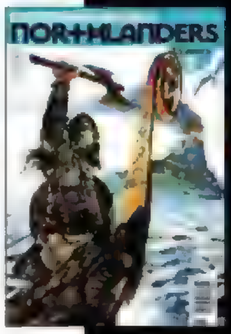


1 **DEADENDERS:** Ed Brubaker and Warren Pleece created this odd cyberpunk/mod mashup set in a post apocalyptic future. Though it ran for just 16 issues before cancellation (and a hastily assembled wrap-up conclusion) it shone brightly as one of the more unique books in Vertigo's history.

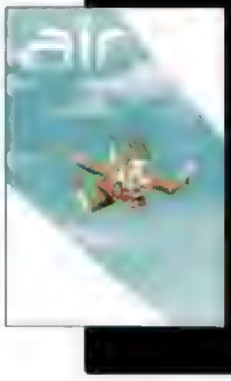
2 **SAUCER COUNTRY:** Paul Cornell and Ryan Kelly delve deep into UFOlogy with the tale of a presidential candidate who claims to have been abducted by aliens. Hugo-nominated, brilliantly drawn, it felt like a new Vertigo classic. Disappointing sales meant it was axed after just 14 issues.



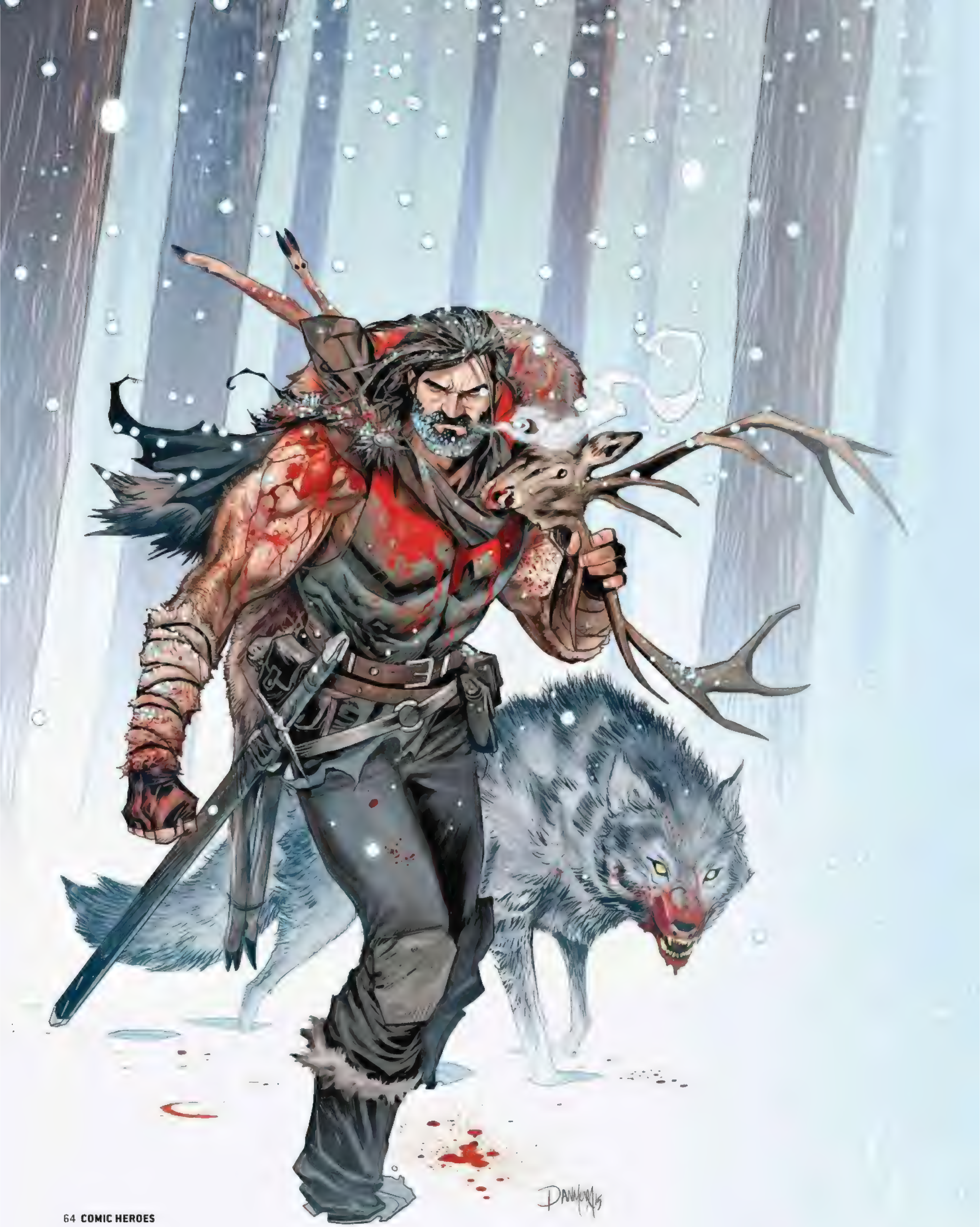
3 **YOUNG LIARS:** Set in present-day New York, this was a trippy, twisty splicing of American teen comics, pop music and serious weirdness written and drawn by David Lapham. Dark, snarky and funny as heck. Perhaps appropriately, it lived fast and died young.



4 **NORTHLANDERS:** Brian Wood's gritty Norse saga, while fictional, was a dynamic and well researched look at the lives – and deaths – of people in the Viking Age. It should have run for years, but lasted just four. Still, its 50 issues are some of the most exciting comics from DC in ages.



5 **AIR:** *Ms. Marvel* writer G Willow Wilson penned this bizarre tale of an air stewardess roped into an anti-terrorist plot that soon expands to take in pan-dimensional travel, Amelia Earhart and supernatural events. Axed after 24 issues, it felt as if Wilson was just getting started...


DANMORA 15

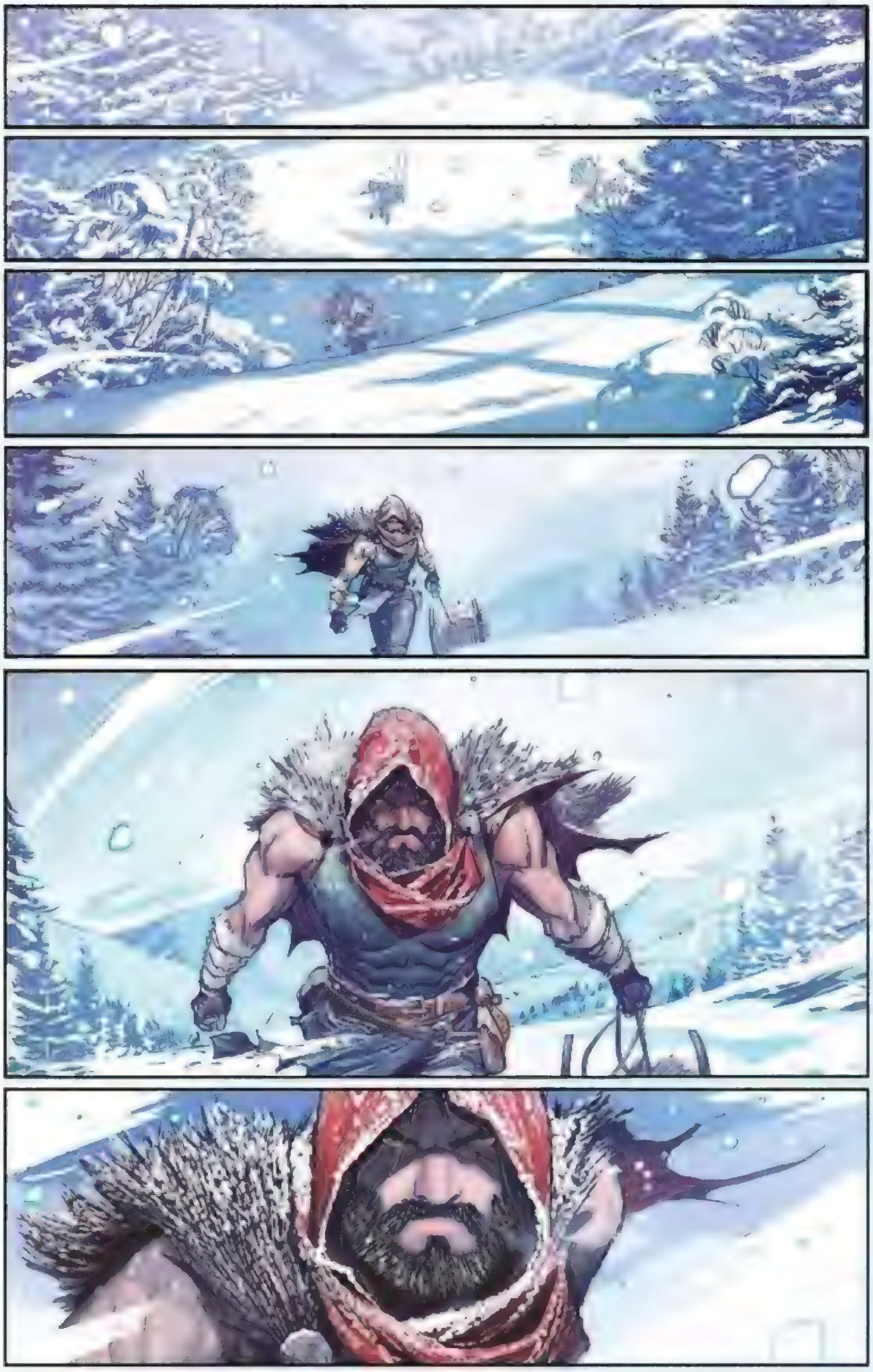
# SANTA KLAUS

## YEAR ONE

OFF-THE-WALL, BUT PERFECTLY LOGICAL. ***STEPHEN JEWELL*** TALKS TO ***GRANT MORRISON*** ABOUT REIMAGINING SANTA CLAUS AS A SUPERHERO, AND OTHER PROJECTS...

From reinventing the Santa Claus myth for the 21st century in *Klaus* to taking charge of cult sci-fi/fantasy magazine *Heavy Metal*, the future is looking bright for Grant Morrison. The recently completed *Multiversity* – an ambitious journey through the many worlds that constitute DC's multiverse – appeared to be the Glasgow auteur's last word on mainstream superheroes, although he isn't quite done with the likes of Wonder Woman, The Flash and Batman just yet.

Admitting that he and his wife and manager Kristan Morrison have made "a particular effort to reach out to various publishers," the 56-year-old is spreading his wings even further, following up 2013's *Happy* and this year's *Nameless* for Image and 2014's *Annihilator* at Legendary with projects for independents such as Black Mask, Graphic India and Boom Studios. Oddly, *Happy* is also set >

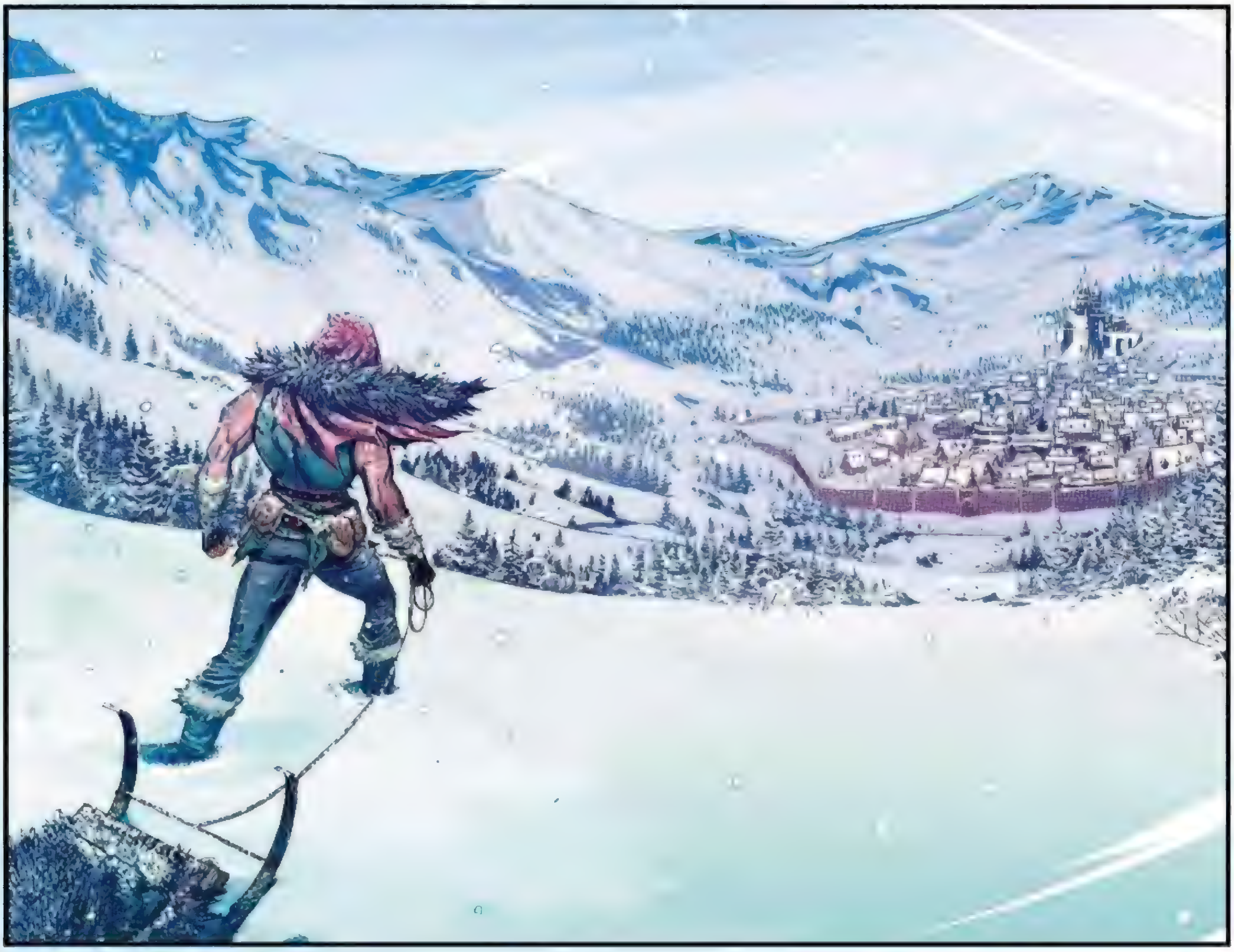


against the backdrop of Christmas, but Morrison denies he's aiming to become the comic book answer to Charles Dickens: "I can't say I've had any particular interest in Christmas since I was a child. But I suppose *Klaus* is in some way an attempt to atone for the disgusting paedophile Santa of *Happy*!"

***COMIC HEROES:*** **You described *Klaus* as an attempt to create your own big iconic character like Superman or The Doctor...**
***GRANT MORRISON:*** I was very much thinking along the lines of something like *Batman: Year One*, as the basic conceit was "What if I treat Santa Claus as the world's most famous superhero?" This meant applying all the classic tropes of the superhero story – the origin tale, the costume, the secret identity, the headquarters, the powers and gadgets – and I soon found that I had a fairly fresh and engaging new take on Santa Claus. It was a bit of a no-brainer once I started and I'm surprised that no one has ever done this yet.

***CH:*** **Father Christmas's Dutch counterpart Sinterklaas can be**

> ***WHAT IF I TREAT SANTA CLAUS AS A SUPERHERO, WITH AN ORIGIN TALE, SECRET IDENTITY, POWERS AND GADGETS?***



KLAUS © GRANT MORRISON & DAN MORA

**traced back to pre-Christian Europe and there are links to both Odin and the Wild Hunt. Do you tap into Santa's pagan past?**
*GM:* I've tried to incorporate all the various strands in one way or another with Klaus starting off by wearing green, as was the case historically. And there's a definite shout-out to the Wild Hunt later in the series. Seeing as it's me, a big part of this story involves the shamanic roots of Santa and the notion that his red and white outfit is derived from the colours of the hallucinatory *Amanita muscaria* mushroom. Siberian shamans would also drink reindeer urine after the beasts had eaten the 'shrooms in order to attain visionary states of flight, or at least that was their excuse! The first issue goes quite psychedelic.

*CH:* **Do you also allude to more recent Christmas classics like *Elf, It's A Wonderful Life* or recent versions of *A Christmas Carol*?**
*GM:* *Happy* was my attempt to update *It's A Wonderful Life* via *Pulp Fiction*, so there's nothing much like that in *Klaus*. The idea is not to do a big Christmas compendium with the whole history and meaning of Santa Claus represented in six issues, but simply to tell the opening tale and establish the principal characters of what I hope will be a long-running series of stories. The first one's like a little weird folk tale but the possibilities for future volumes are endless.

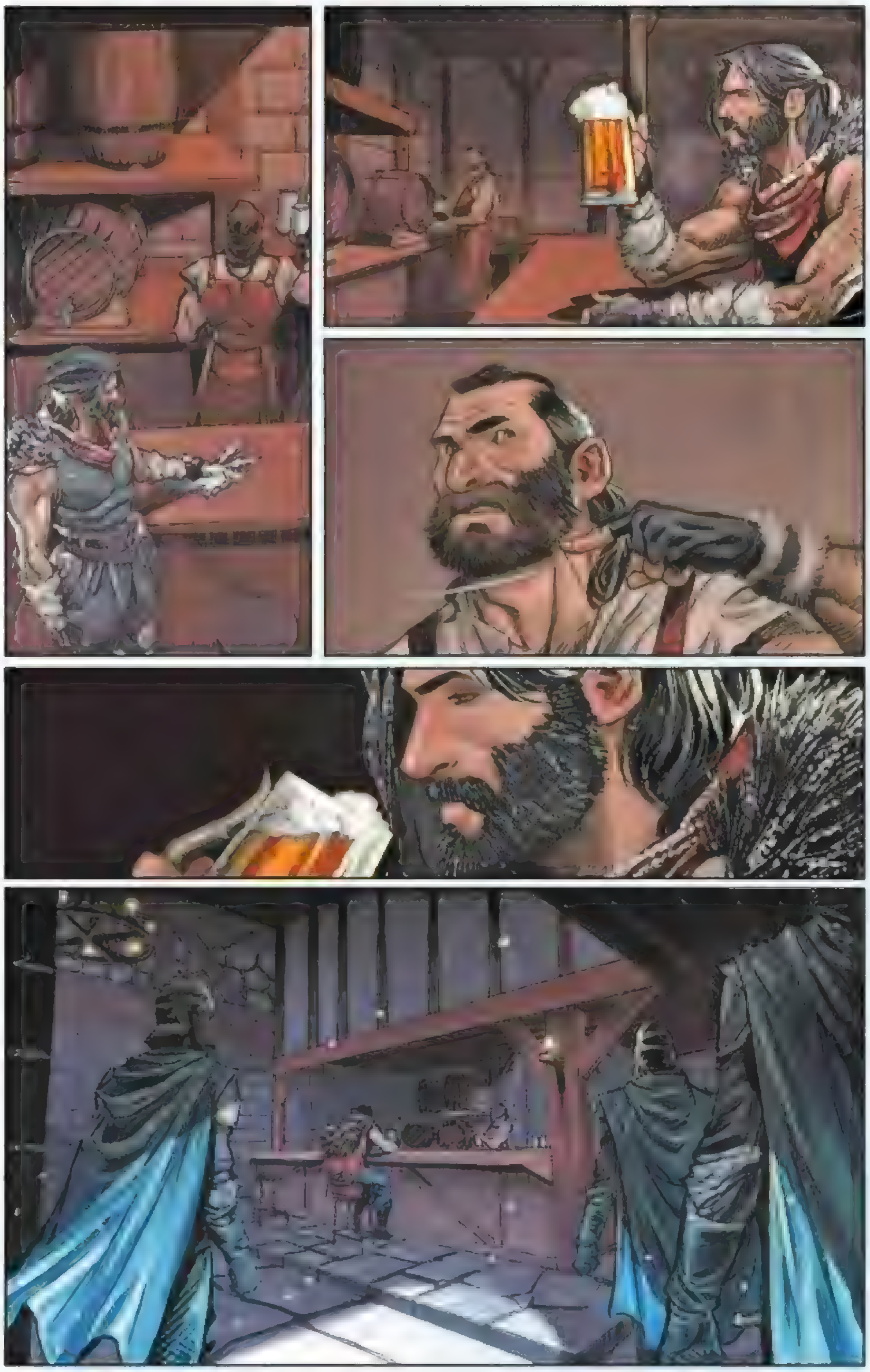
**Opposite:** Morrison has described *Klaus* as "part action thriller, part sword-and-sorcery, part romance, part science fiction." With magic mushrooms, naturally.

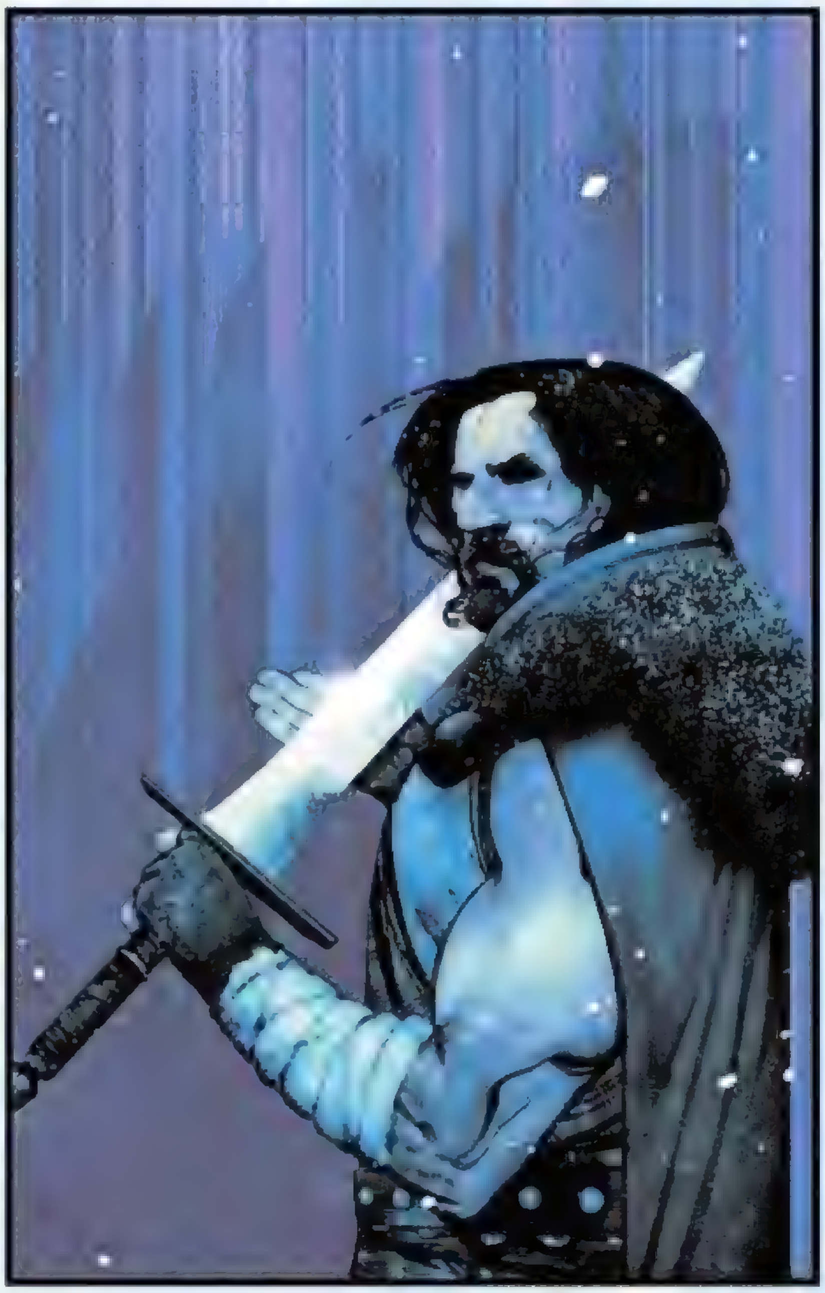
**Above:** "Who is Santa Claus really? How did he get his start? Why does he do what he does? How does he do it? What's the deal with the chimneys? And where does he get all those wonderful toys?"

*CH:* **So *Klaus* is not a self-contained one-off? Is there plenty of scope for future series?**
*GM:* It's designed to have sequel potential – and given the basic question "What does Santa Claus do on the other 364 days of the year?" the answers are limitless, as is the potential to tell all kinds of stories set in different places.

*CH:* **You'd like *Klaus* to become a perennial Christmas favourite?**

>





**Above:** "The first image that came to me is this ferocious-looking, almost Conan the Barbarian young man with black hair and a black beard; the snow is coming down onto him, it's turning his hair and beard white. We've never seen him young. We've never seen how the hell this happened – how did he get to be Santa Claus? It seemed such an obvious, ridiculous idea, that I really seized on it and it became a kind of *Lord of the Rings* meets *Batman Begins*."

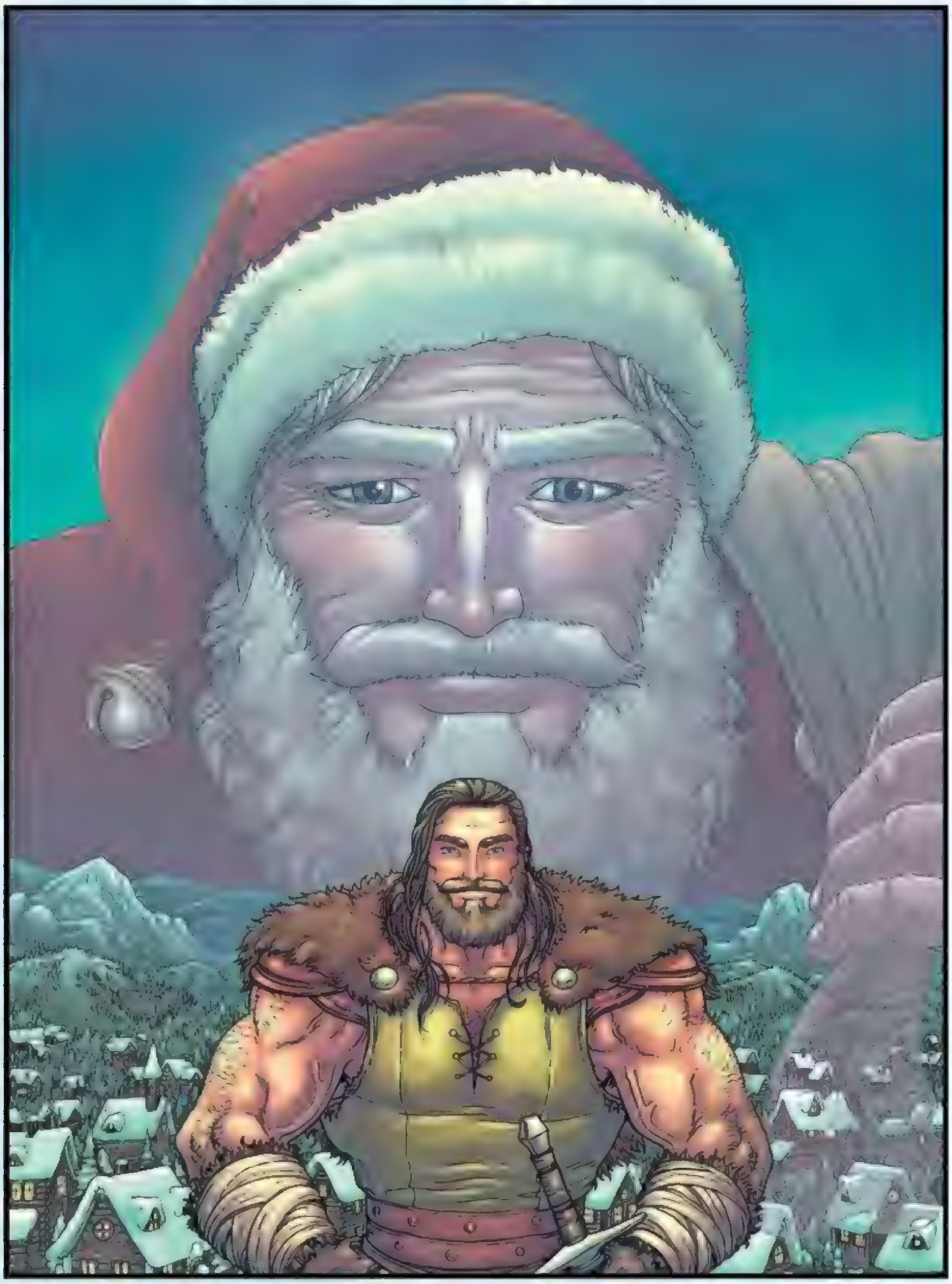
***GM:*** Most definitely! It's the secret origin story of Santa Claus, after all, and what kid doesn't want to know what that's all about?

***CH:*** **Much like today's comics, Charles Dickens's novels like *The Pickwick Papers* were initially published in shilling instalments before being collected...**
***GM:*** I imagine that were he alive today, Dickens could easily be persuaded to write superhero comics and I'm sure he'd be great at it – he'd mastered the serialised form, the broad, memorable characters, the mawkish sentimentality and gleeful cruelty. Thinking about it, I can almost see a case here for positioning Stan Lee as the 20th century Dickens! Or imagine Arthur Conan Doyle doing a Batman graphic novel, or Clark Ashton Smith's *Sandman*!

***CH:*** **You're paired with Dan Mora on *Klaus*. What qualities does he bring to the book?**

***GM:*** Among other things he has a beautiful 'watercolour sketch' approach. It reminds me of production stills from classic Disney cartoons, which was part of the feel that I was going for. He has a brilliant command of anatomy and composition and a beautiful storybook illustration quality to his work, which really suits this story. He does the most amazing work in what seems like an effortless way.

***CH:*** **Why did you decide to publish *Klaus* through Boom? Were you enticed by their younger readers range, Kaboom?**
***GM:*** Boom seemed more appropriate for *Klaus*. For while it's not strictly 'all-ages' as I have claimed, it's still aimed at a much wider family audience than the other stuff I'm doing right now. In terms of being scary or violent, it's



**Above:** Dan Mora's incentive cover image perfectly encapsulates how he and Morrison are "combining the tropes of superhero stories with epic fantasy to create a new take on the secret history of Santa Claus."

probably on a par with *The Hobbit* or *Doctor Who*, so it's maybe not for five-year-olds but older kids should hopefully enjoy seeing a tougher, more badass Santa Claus!

***CH:*** **You take over as Editor-in-Chief of *Heavy Metal* in February. How did that come about?**
***GM:*** I've been friends with Jeff Krelitz, one of the new owners of *Heavy Metal*, for a few years and he invited me. I like to do things outside my comfort zone, so I agreed. My job on the magazine involves selecting stories and curating the style and approach of the magazine. I don't have to do all the hard parts of an editor's job, I just get the fun bit! I'll be writing a story in each issue and I'll be bringing in a few friends from comics and the music business to help create new content.

***CH:*** **Heavy Metal started in 1977 as an American version of French magazine *Métal Hurlant*. Were you a fan of the magazine then?**
***GM:*** Not really. I followed Richard Corben's work there for a while but that was about the extent of my involvement. I've always been aware of the magazine but I'm not a particularly voracious reader of comics and generally I've only ever been interested in mainstream superhero stuff or Vertigo books. I was never into the underground, alternative or small press scenes, for instance. That's not to say that there isn't amazing work in those areas, just that I'm too lazy to seek it out. I'm usually too busy

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## AVATAREX

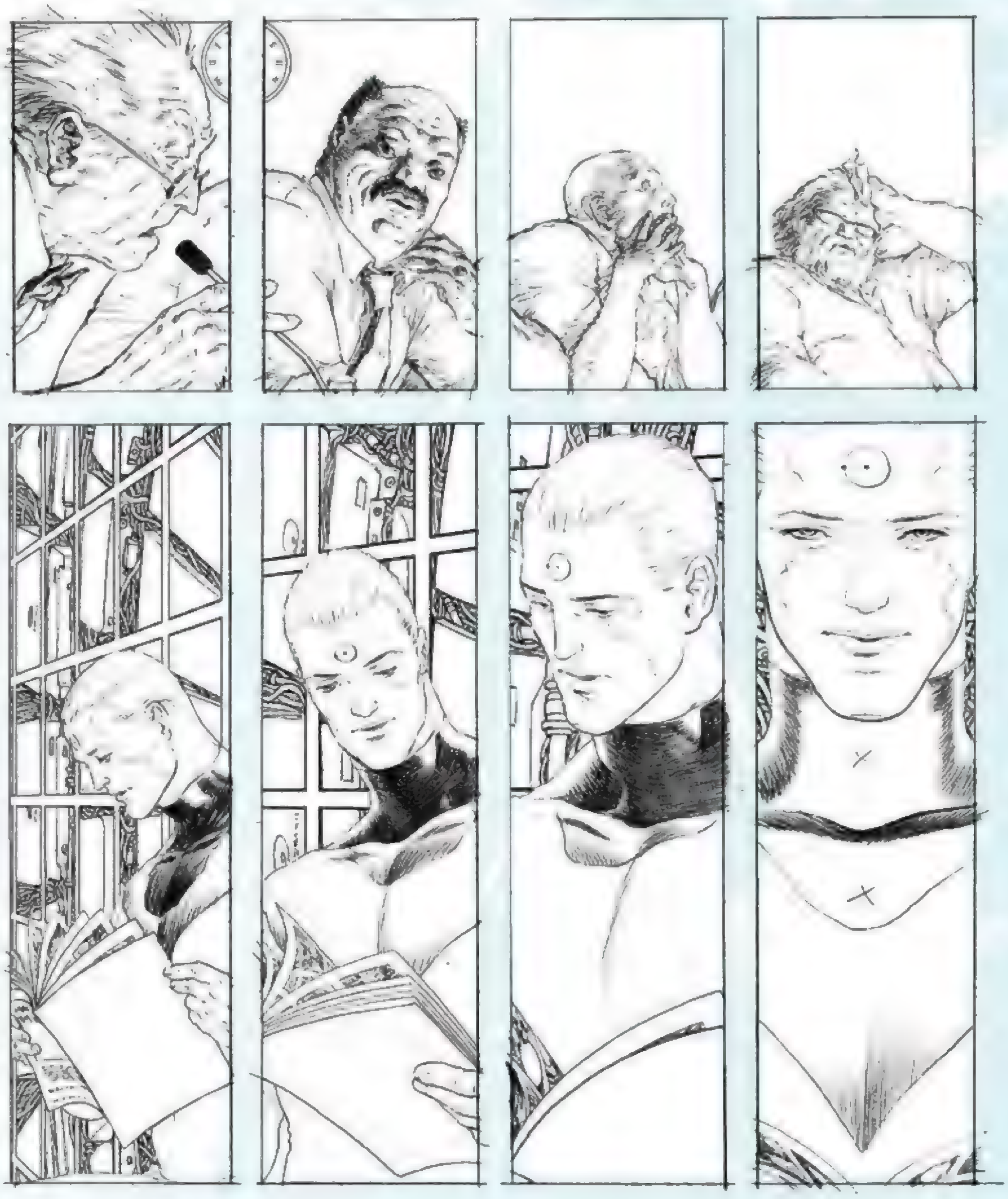
**While Graphic India is currently adapting Morrison's film treatment and art-book for *18 Days* into a monthly comic series drawn by Jeevan Kang, Morrison is writing *Avatarex*, a new digital series, also illustrated by Kang, which will be released in six-page instalments online. "It's the only ongoing superhero book I'm doing in the foreseeable future," he says. "It's my attempt to build a superhero universe for India."**

**A portion of the proceeds will go towards promoting literacy and improving the lot of young women in India. "The country is firing into the future on all cylinders but the general attitude towards women and girls is simply unacceptable in a 21st century society," says Morrison. "I see any attempt, however tiny, to help bring the sub-continent out of the dark ages on that particular issue as a positive one. For that reason, there's a sense that superheroes can actually do some good there and be culturally meaningful and useful."**

creating comics to read them, and apart from the DC comps I get every month, I tend to just figure out what's going on in the comics business by reading reviews.

***CH:*** **You've talked of restoring *Heavy Metal*'s "1970s punk energy" but it was maybe more prog rock at the time...**
*GM:* In the '70s, I was convinced *Heavy Metal* was a sort of Euro hippie thing. In the '80s it seemed to be all hair metal and 'Girls, Girls, Girls.' In the '90s, my attention was elsewhere. In all cases, I was dismissing the content in an unfair and prejudicial manner. Having now read quite a lot of the back catalogue, there's a lot to like and a lot to think about as I try to push the magazine forward into a new and hopefully more contemporary direction.

***CH:*** **With *Multiversity* concluded, you'll be launching *Multiversity Too*, a new line of graphic novels set in those various realities, kicking off with *The Flash*...**
*GM:* *Multiversity Too* was a banner Dan Didio devised to encompass the projects that I still have on my slate at DC. It includes a Flash story, which I figured I could place as *Flash: Earth One*, but Joe Strazcynski is doing *Flash: Earth One*. So Dan suggested we bring back the Elseworlds idea, brand it as *Multiversity Too* and launch with this Flash thing, and I believe other creators will also be part of the *Multiversity Too* rollout. Although, to be perfectly honest, what I'm doing has barely the slenderest and most tangential connection to the [original] *Multiversity* series.

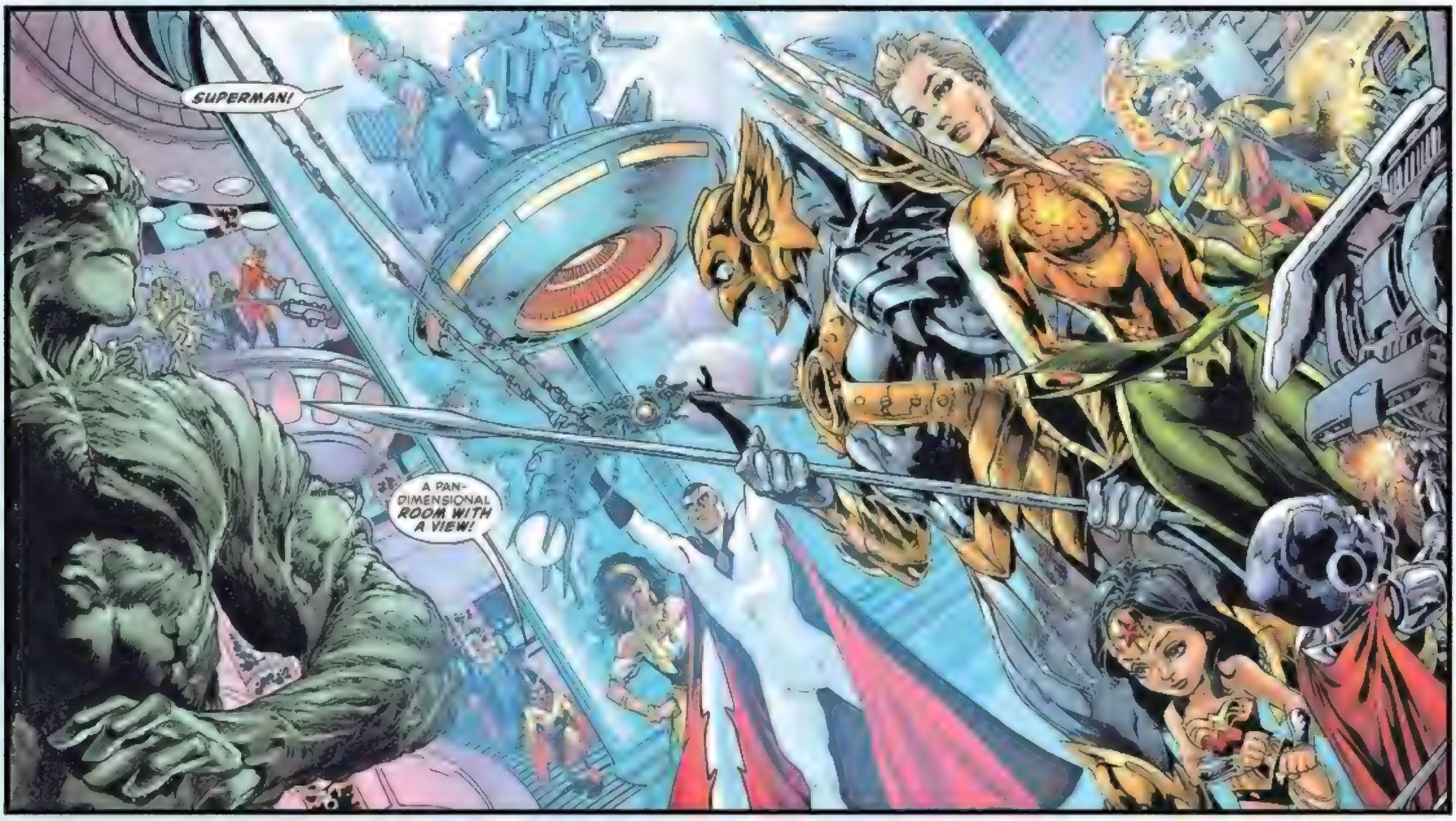


**Above:** Morrison's *Multiversity* also revisited familiar characters, such as Captain Atom, the basis for *Watchmen*'s Doctor Manhattan.

***CH:*** **You're also writing a new series of *Batman: Black and White*, and your *Wonder Woman: Earth One* graphic novel with Yanick Paquette is out in spring...**
*GM:* I had a bunch of ideas for Batman short stories that I never got around to doing, so now we're putting them out with art by some amazing alternative artists and photographers who haven't really done comics before. And *Wonder Woman* is finished! I'm tweaking dialogue right now but it's all done and coloured. It looks astonishing!

*I GENERALLY CAN'T BE BOTHERED WATCHING TELLY. I'VE NEVER SEEN THOSE BOX-SET FAVOURITES*

***CH:*** **You previously told us that 21st century superheroes will go "onto the cinema screen first and then into real life." How do you feel about their proliferation on TV in shows like *Arrow, Agent Carter* and *Agents of SHIELD*?**


SUPERMAN!
A PAN-DIMENSIONAL ROOM WITH A VIEW!

MULTIVERSITY © DC COMICS

**GM:** The last TV series I watched was the first season of *True Detective*. Apart from the news, *Reporting Scotland*, *Doctor Who* and the odd *Horizon* show, I generally can't be bothered watching telly. I've never seen *The Sopranos*, *Breaking Bad*, *Game Of Thrones*, *The Wire* or any other of those box-set favourites, let alone *The Flash*, *Daredevil* or *Gotham*, so I'm the wrong person to ask about this. I know so much about all of these via cultural osmosis that the time expended in actually watching them would just seem like wasted time. I expect that now the barriers are down, we'll see all kinds of superhero shows, though. Having moved fairly successfully from the comics, superheroes will become just another acceptable TV genre.

**CH: From *Ant-Man* to *Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice*, superheroes are also becoming mainstays in the cinema...**

**GM:** I don't think I've seen any great ones for a while. *Age of Ultron* was solid but naturally not quite the game-changer the first *Avengers* was. *Suicide Squad* looks quite interesting and I'm excited to see Jared Leto's Joker. He called me to talk about his approach to the character and I steered him in a few directions. I'm keen to see if anything other than slicked-back hair and the Marilyn Manson vibe made it into his performance. Otherwise, we're all familiar with the meat-and-potatoes superhero stuff, so I think it's time they made *Miracleman*, *Enigma*, *Flex Mentallo* or something else that's a bit more challenging.

**Above:** *Multiversity* was less weird than most of the work that Morrison is famed for, like *Doom Patrol* and *Animal Man*. Like his *Final Crisis*, it treated superheroes with affection. Plus, yes, some unpredictability.

**CH: Black Mask is turning your script for *Sinatoro*, your proposed film with director Adam Egypt Mortimer, into a comic series drawn by Vanessa Del Rey. Any other screenplays in the pipeline?**

**GM:** My shadowy Hollywood career has actually been delivering the goods this year: I just finished the latest draft of a screenplay for a major studio, I've also sold a TV pilot co-written with the writer/director of two of my favourite films of the last ten years, and just this morning we got the offer in for a pilot based on another of my books, so it's all going well. It would certainly be nice to see something made before I die!

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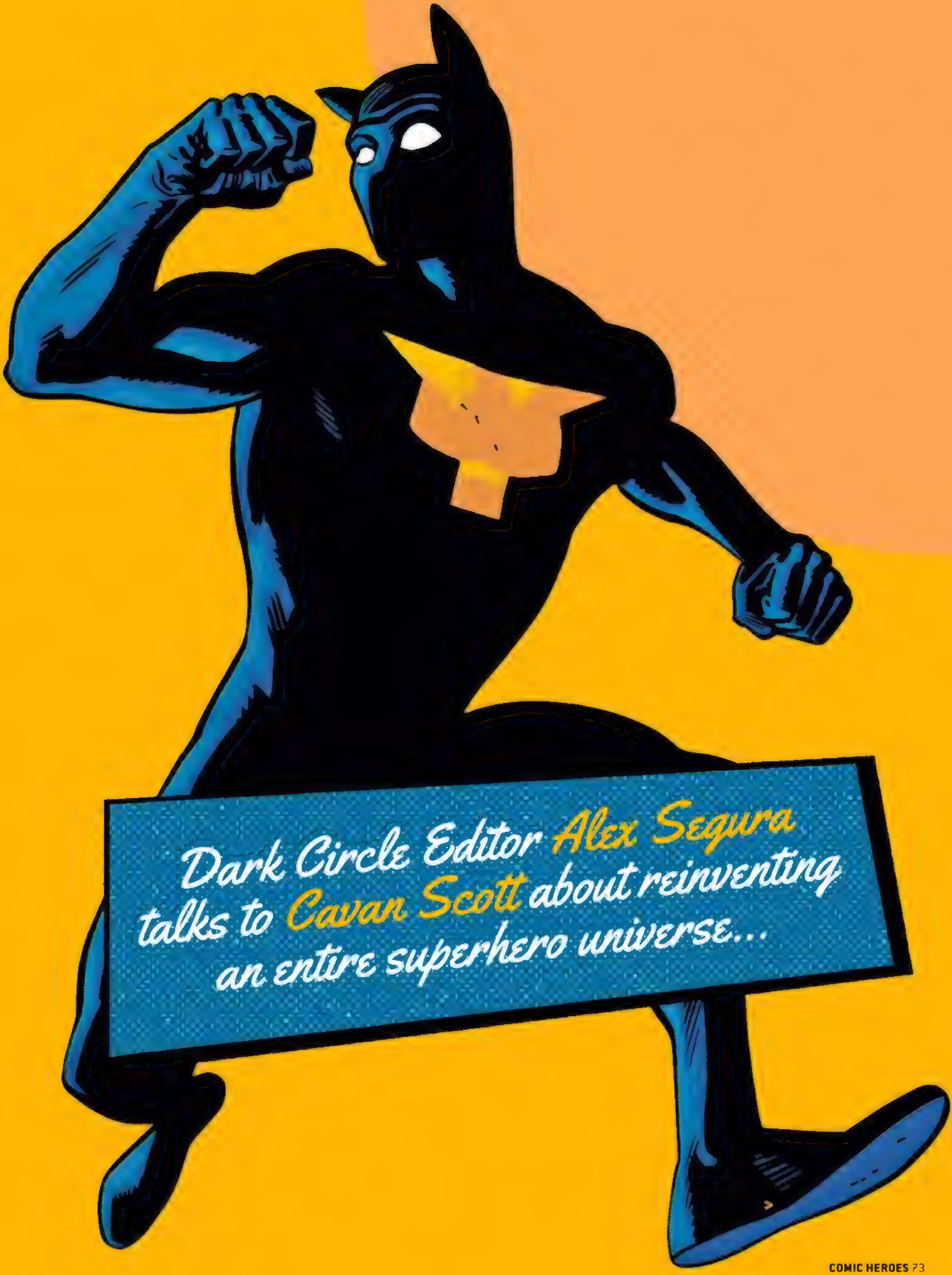
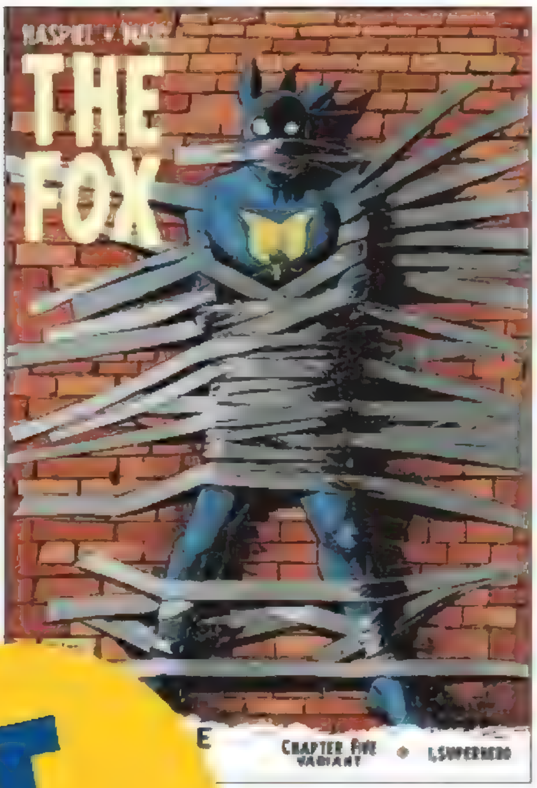
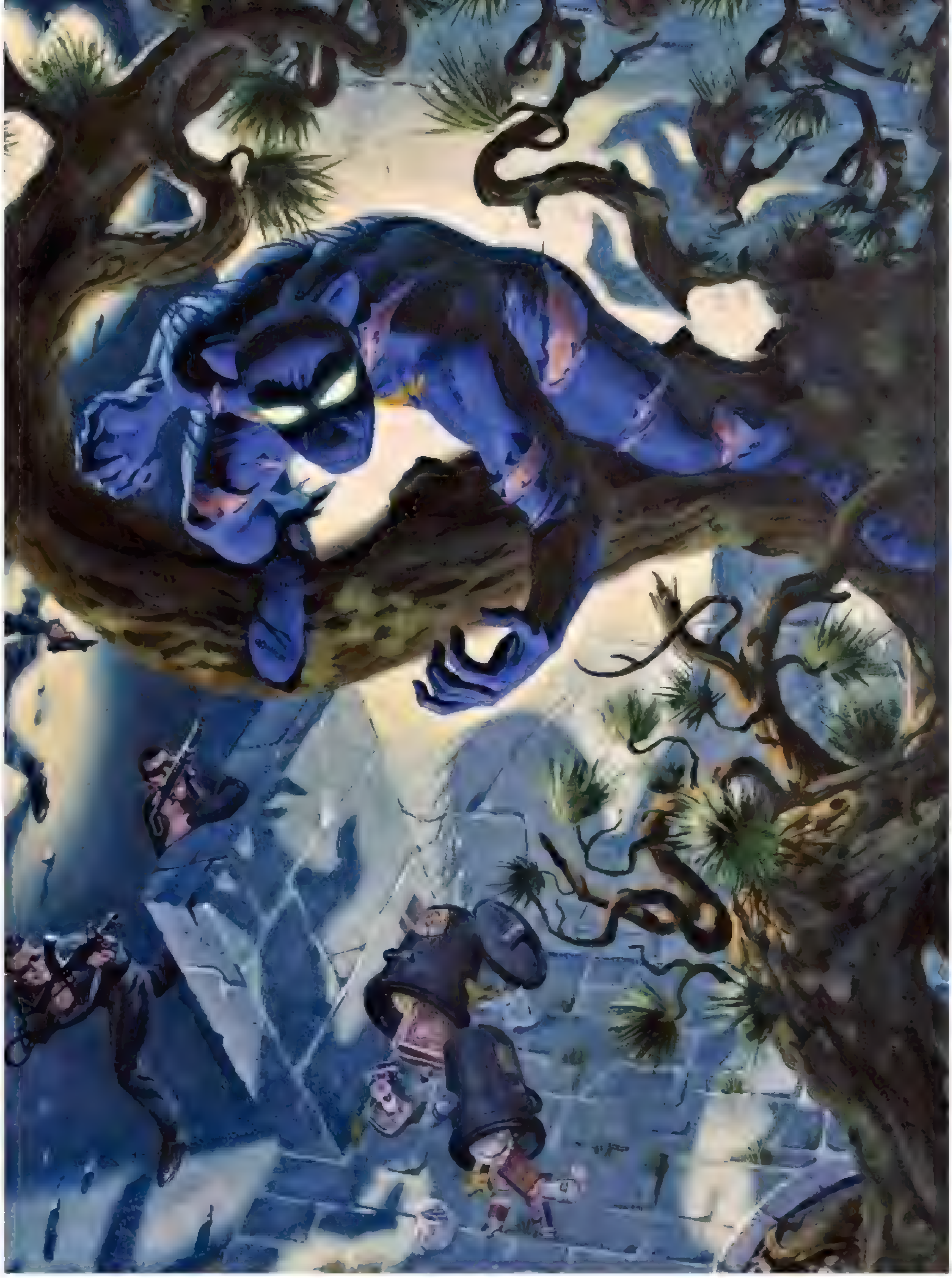
# ENTER THE CIRCLE



Dark Circle Editor **Alex Segura** talks to **Cavan Scott** about reinventing an entire superhero universe…

HASPIEL + WAID
THE FOX
DARK CIRCLE COMICS
"FOX HUNT" NUMBER FOUR





**The Shield. The Fox. The Black Hood.** Even comic fans may be surprised to hear that these characters are this year celebrating their 75th anniversaries. Legendary publisher Archie Comics hopes to make them better known with its new Dark Circle imprint.

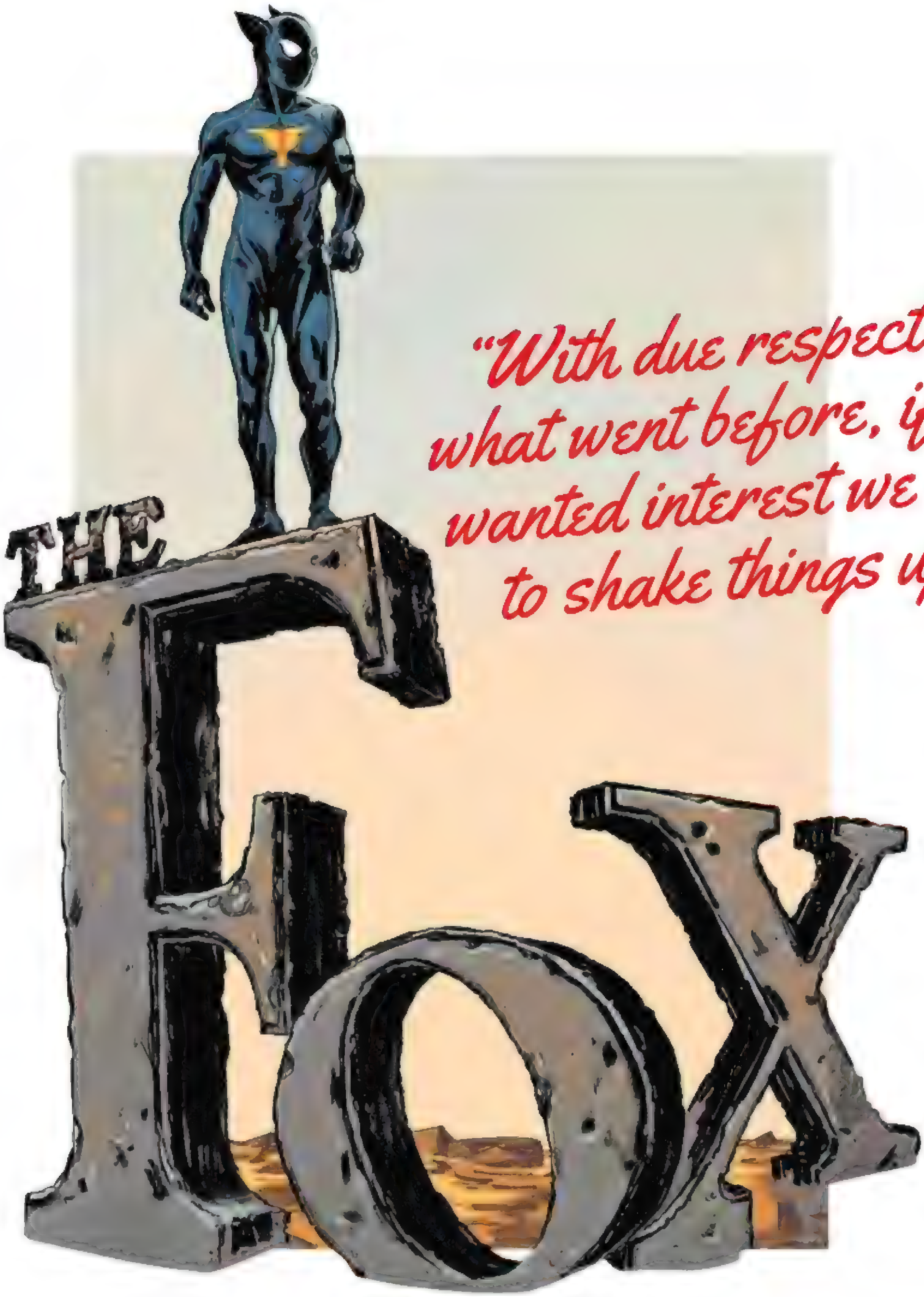
The fact that Archie even has its own superheroes might be a surprise. But they actually predate the publisher's eponymous teen, as editor Alex Segura explains: "Like DC Comics and Marvel, Archie has had a stable of superheroes since the golden age of comics. However, over time they've been constantly rebranded, relaunched or licensed out to other publishers."

The company originally known as MLJ has published its heroes in a cavalcade of imprints including Archie Adventure Series, Mighty Comics and Red Circle. They've even twice been published by DC, first as part of the ill-fated Impact Comics line of the 1990s and then, between 2007 and 2011, as part of the regular DC Universe. The nomads of the comic world, it's little wonder that the Red Circle heroes struggled to achieve the recognition their legacy deserves.

**Above:** *The Fox* reinvents a hero created in 1940, adding a smart, modern vibe. Following last year's *Freak Magnet* miniseries, the story arc in the first five issues of the ongoing series is described as "Spider-Man versus the Sinister Six... times a thousand."

This all began to change when Jon Goldwater became Archie's CEO in 2009. Realising what a valuable resource they were sitting on, he began bringing the Red Circle rights back in-house. After all, how many publishers had a ready-made superhero universe? Next came the task of setting up a creative team to reinvent these forgotten heroes for a new generation.

Enter writer and editor Alex Segura, who has fond memories of the Red Circle heroes from growing up in Miami: "I read Archie when I was a kid, and always thought it was cool that they also had their



"With due respect to what went before, if we wanted interest we had to shake things up"

own superheroes. Even after I'd made the transition to Marvel and DC, I always kept an eye on the Red Circle heroes."

Did this childhood knowledge help when he became editor of Archie's superhero line in 2014? "I was familiar, but I wouldn't say I was embedded in the continuity, which ultimately I think is a good thing. When I started at Archie, we needed to reimagine the Red Circle heroes in a way that showed this wasn't just another iteration. The classic versions of these characters were held dear by many people, but with due respect to what had gone before, if we wanted to get interest, we had to shake things up."

Segura tested the waters for Archie's new brand of superheroics by reinventing The Fox. Written by Mark Waid (*The Avengers*) with art by Dean Haspiel (*The Quitter*), the five-issue *Freak Magnet* miniseries was critically acclaimed, but was traditional superhero fare with its smart-talking crime-fighter and an outlandish rogues gallery worthy of Spider-Man himself.

However, when Dark Circle finally rebranded in February 2015, its first title was decidedly different from the norm. When he was introduced in 1940, Black Hood was a man of mystery clad head-to-toe in a garish yellow costume. 75 years later, his modern-day counterpart is a facially scarred cop who, addled by painkillers, takes the law into his own hands as a brutal masked vigilante. This radical departure was the brainchild of crime author Duane Swierczynski, who teamed up with artist Michael Gaydos to create a gritty tale of violence, vice and addiction.

### A new beginning

"With the Black Hood, we were talking to a bunch of different creators," recalls Segura, "but Duane's pitch really knocked us out. Duane later admitted that he didn't think we would say yes, because it was so dark and intense, but we told him to keep pushing the boundaries."

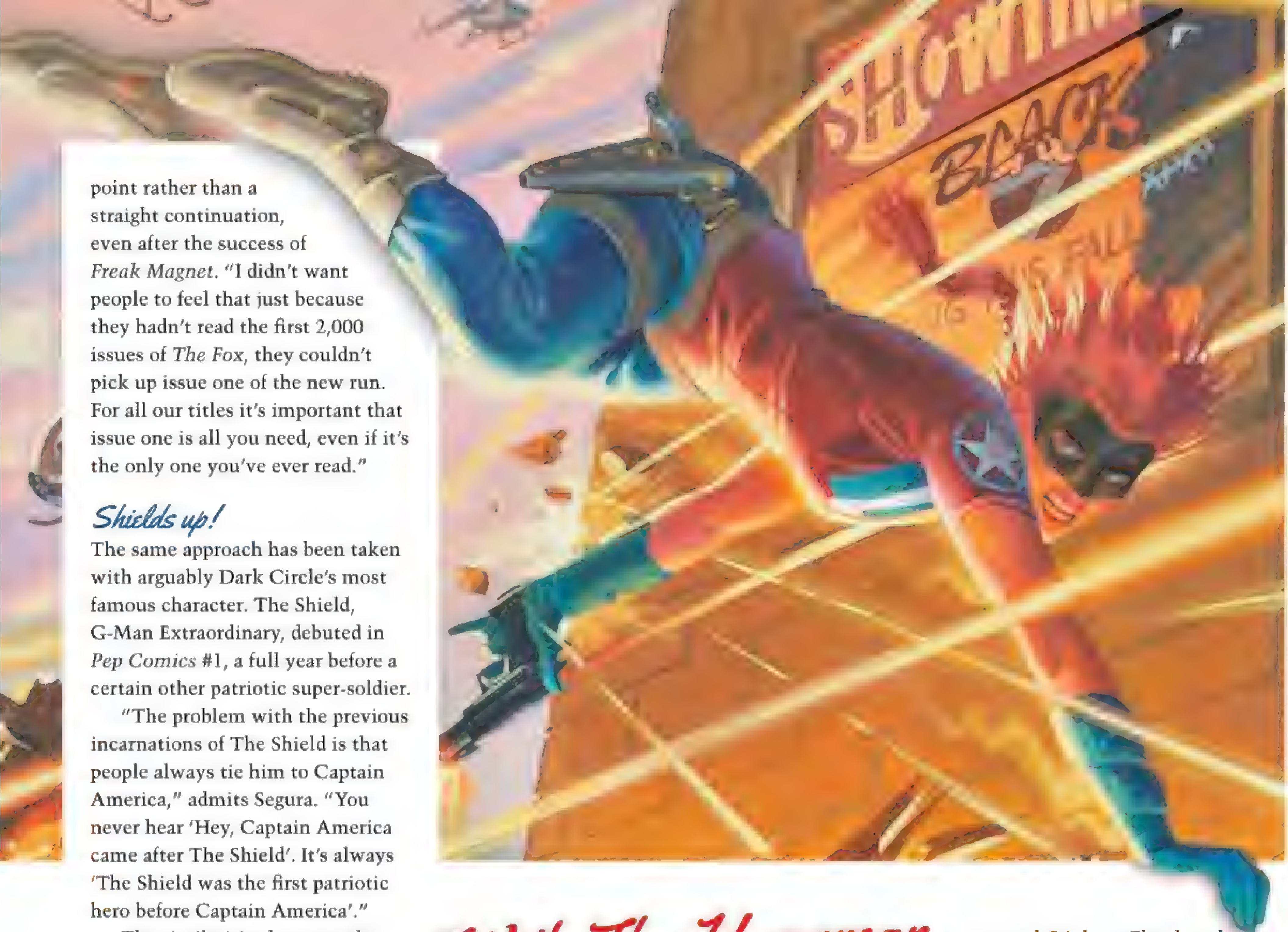
And push he did, *Black Hood* becoming the first Archie comic to drop the f-bomb. "*Black Hood* was a game-changer for the imprint," insists Segura, "as it showed that we were willing to try new things and weren't just trying to out-Marvel Marvel."

The success of *Black Hood* was quickly followed by a new ongoing series for Haspiel and Waid's Fox. Segura was determined, however, that the book would be a jumping-on >

**Above:** The creators' affection for the greats of the past is evident in this Eisner-esque title.

**Below:** Each Dark Circle title has its own personality and *The Black Hood* is much, much darker.

The Black Hood



point rather than a straight continuation, even after the success of *Freak Magnet*. "I didn't want people to feel that just because they hadn't read the first 2,000 issues of *The Fox*, they couldn't pick up issue one of the new run. For all our titles it's important that issue one is all you need, even if it's the only one you've ever read."

## Shields up!

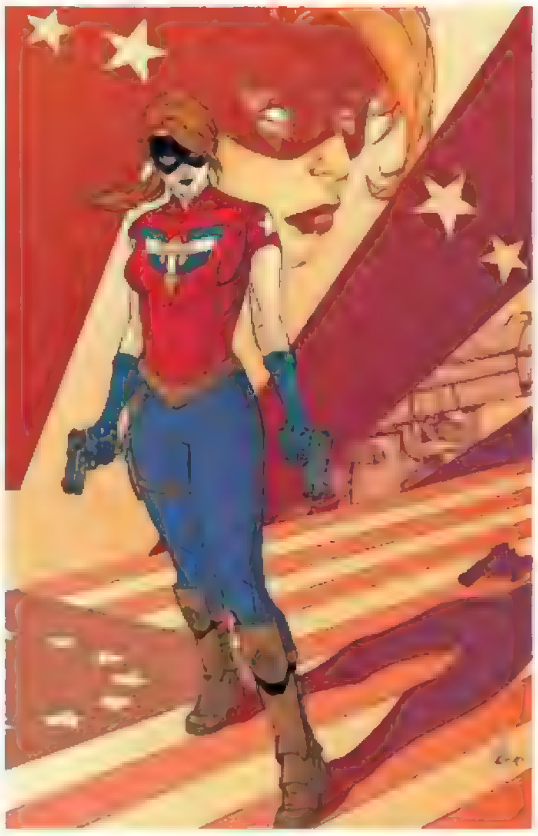
The same approach has been taken with arguably Dark Circle's most famous character. The Shield, G-Man Extraordinary, debuted in *Pep Comics* #1, a full year before a certain other patriotic super-soldier.

"The problem with the previous incarnations of The Shield is that people always tie him to Captain America," admits Segura. "You never hear 'Hey, Captain America came after The Shield'. It's always 'The Shield was the first patriotic hero before Captain America'."

The similarities between the two characters are obvious. Both wear costumes fashioned from the Stars and Stripes and owe their enhanced abilities to a chemical created to combat the Nazi threat. It's little wonder that Segura wanted to break out from Cap's shadow: "We wanted to make sure The Shield was her own character, able to stand on her own."

So the G-Man has become a woman, with Victoria Adams taking up The Shield's mantle. Written by novelists Chuck Wendig and Adam Christopher, *The Shield* is a conspiracy thriller in the style of Tom Clancy, *Homeland* or *The Americans*. "Chuck and Adam's script is an action-packed but thoughtful commentary on what it means to be patriotic today. The high concept is that Victoria has always been The Shield, appearing whenever the country needs her. Now, for the first time, she has no idea who she really is or why she's returned. It's how Chuck and Adam unravel that mystery that's really interesting."

"With The Hangman, we're tapping into the urban legend vibe"



**Above:** The Shield and Captain America were created within a year of each other, but The Shield actually came first, in January 1940.

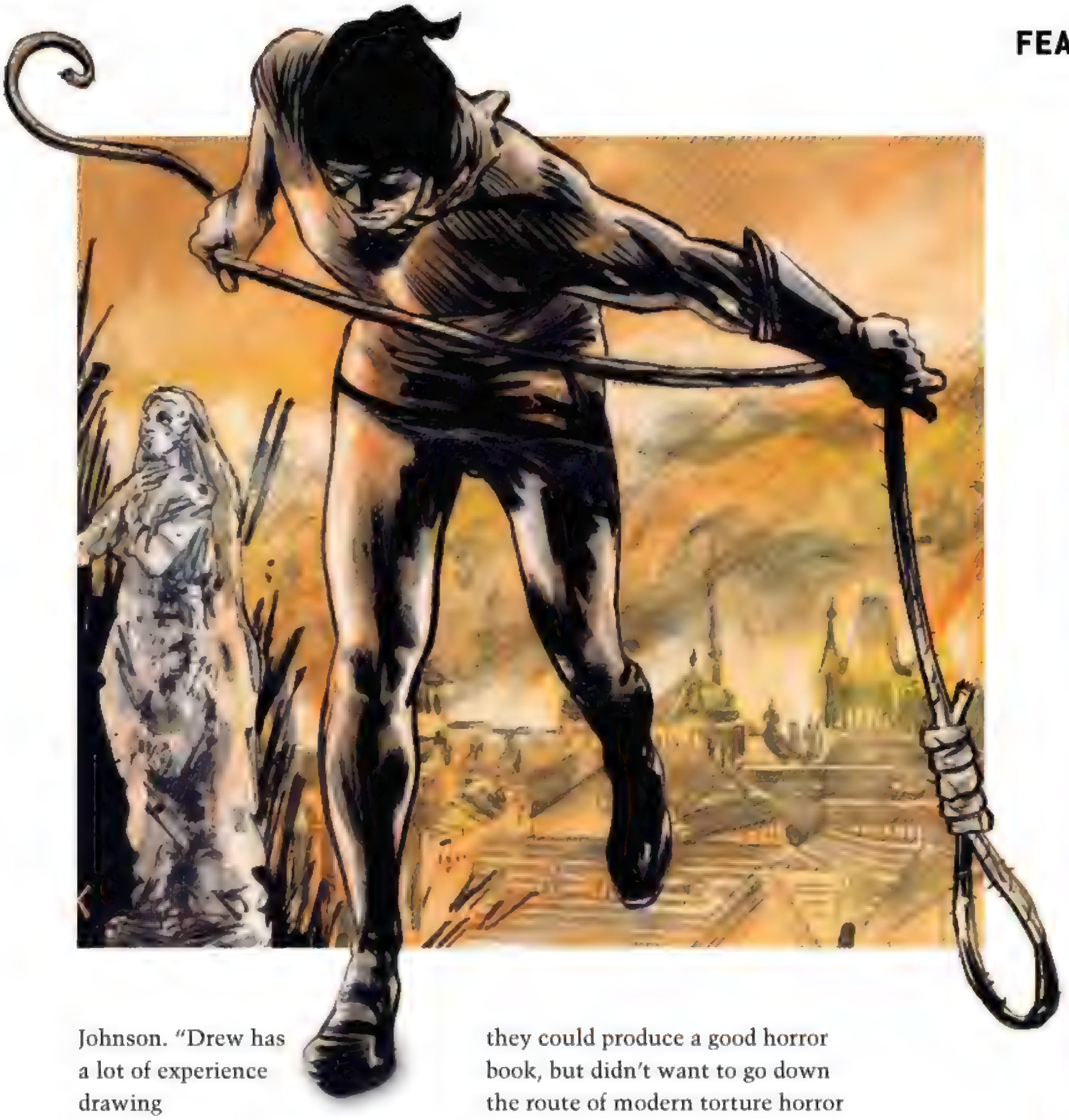
**Left:** How do you distinguish a patriotic character from Cap today? Play down the Stars-and-Stripes look, and make her a woman.

When Segura first met Wendig and Christopher via social media, he had no idea that they would form Dark Circle's first writing partnership. "I was talking to both Chuck and Adam independently, and while I knew they were friends, I didn't realise they were going to pitch together until their outline arrived. It's the perfect balance. Chuck is really intense, his ideas are kinetic and really in your face, while Adam is a smart plotter."

## Writing partners

A writer himself, had Segura made a conscious decision to recruit novelists? "Not specifically," he replies, "but I knew Duane, Chuck and Adam could break down a story in a different way to bring a fresh perspective."

Team Shield is completed by *Wonder Woman* veteran Drew



Johnson. "Drew has a lot of experience drawing superheroes, while also working on creator-owned books like *Midnight Society* for Dark Horse. He's an artist's artist whose main goal is to be a storyteller. Best of all, at this year's San Diego Comic Con he told me how great it was to finally draw a female character that isn't overly sexualised or plain weird, someone that he can show his daughter. By design, The Shield is a very strong female character. Her costume isn't a swimsuit. It's utilitarian, a uniform that serves a purpose. In her we want a character that inspires awe. Chuck, Adam and Drew are certainly providing that."

Two further series are currently in the works, with Frank Tieri and Felix Ruiz's *The Hangman* launching this October. Following the success of the *Afterlife with Archie* (see the boxout on the right) series, Segura knew that they could produce a good horror book, but didn't want to go down the route of modern torture horror cinema, opting instead for a more psychological terror that is, in his words, "not for the faint-hearted."

"With *Hangman*, we're tapping into the urban legend vibe. Frank was the ideal choice as writer as his stories are very street level, but he also has a wide knowledge

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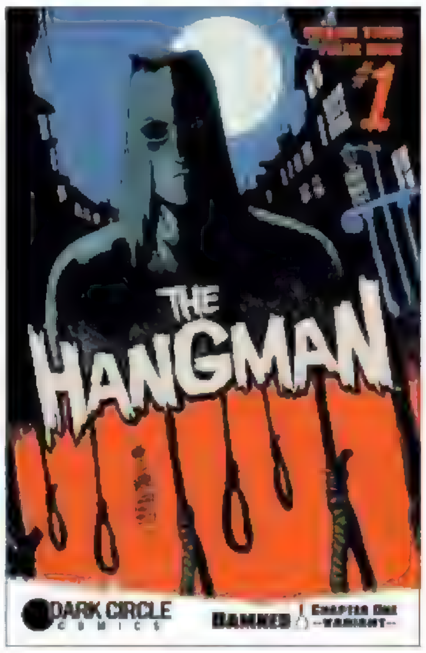


**Above:** The Hangman also originated in the 1940s but the Dark Circle reinvention takes its cue from the name and steers towards urban horror. And you thought Batman was a creature of darkness...!

## The life, death and rebirth of Archie

**First introduced in *Pep Comics* #22 back in December 1941,** Archie Andrews soon became a fixture on the American newsstands, his food-obsessed best friend Jughead and permanent love-triangle with would-be girlfriends Veronica and Betty keeping generations of comic fans entertained.

However, by the 21st century, Archie was something of an anachronism, his stories a throwback to a 1960s heyday, buoyed by the nostalgia of his readers.

That is until 2010, when *Life With Archie* began chronicling the life of a grown-up Archie Andrews and introduced Riverdale's first gay character, Kevin Keller. Four years later, the series came to an unexpected end, the adult Archie taking a bullet for Kevin, who had been campaigning for tougher gun laws.

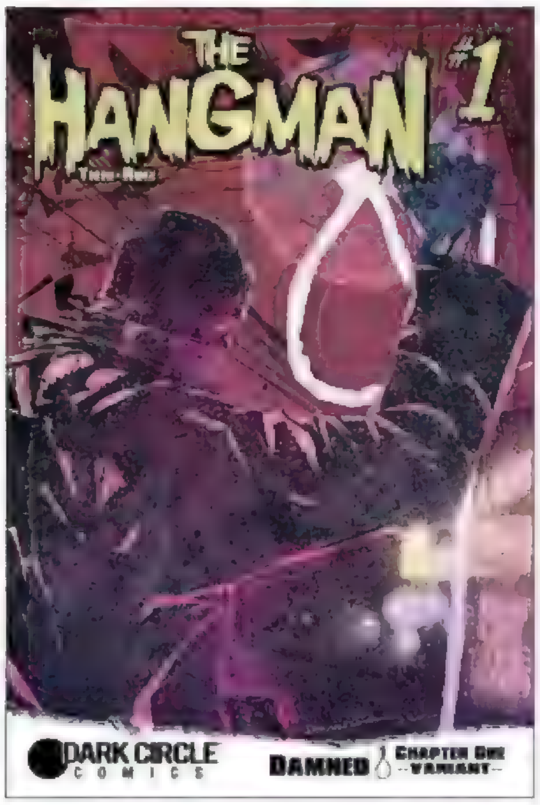
But Archie had found another lease of life as a horror hero, fighting zombies in *Afterlife With Archie* and even alien hunters in *Archie Vs. Predator*.

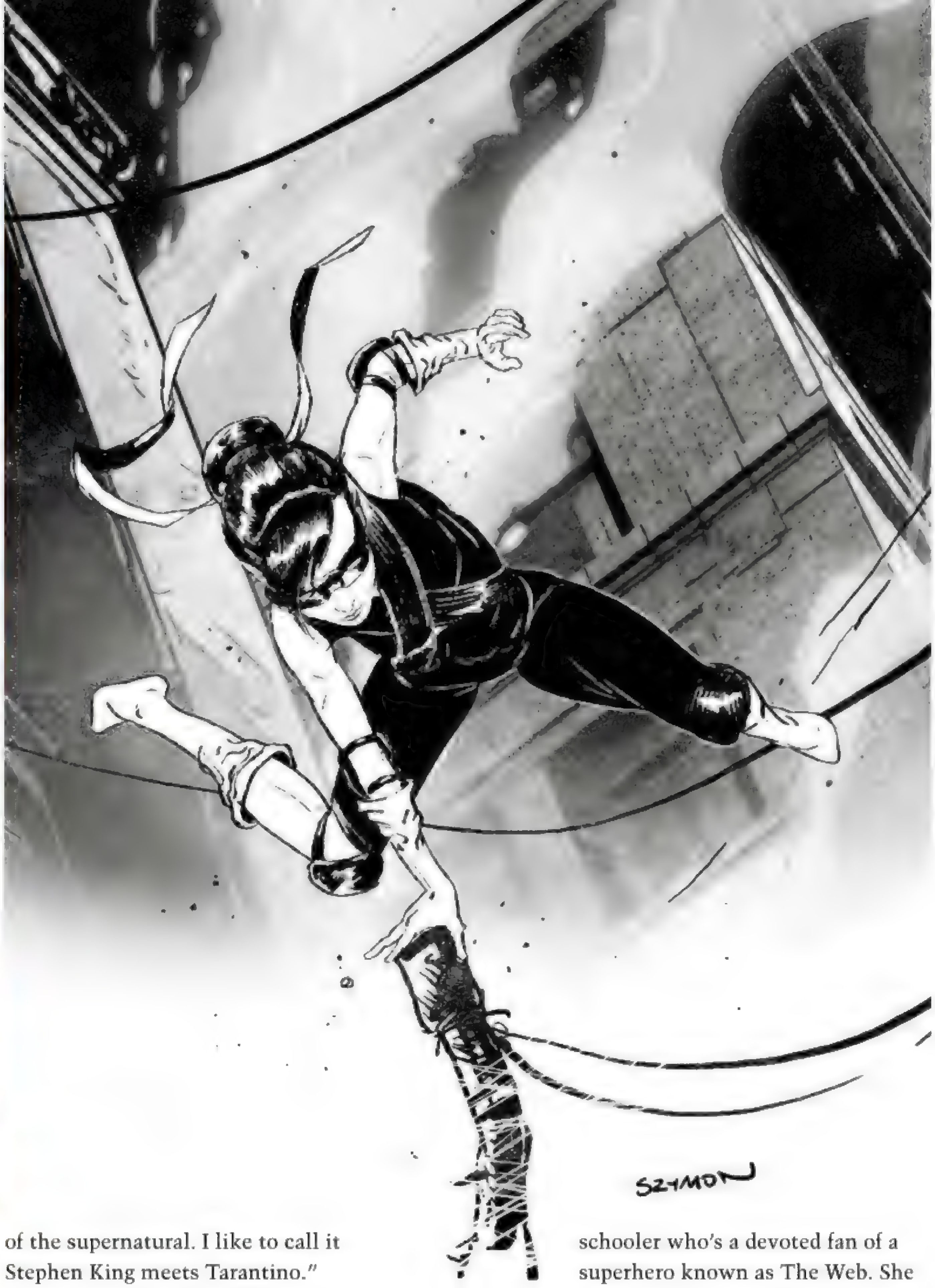
Now, Mark Waid (*The Avengers*) and Fiona Staples (*Saga*) have reinvented Archie for the 21st century (see review, page 122), and a live-action Riverdale pilot is set to premiere Stateside next year. It seems that America's favourite teenager never grows old.

ALL IMAGES © ARCHIE COMIC PUBLICATIONS

THE HANGMAN
#1
DARK CIRCLE COMICS
DAMNED CHAPTER ONE

THE HANGMAN
DARK CIRCLE COMICS
DAMNED CHAPTER TWO VARIANT


THE HANGMAN
#1
DARK CIRCLE COMICS
DAMNED CHAPTER ONE VARIANT



of the supernatural. I like to call it Stephen King meets Tarantino."

Also providing the chills is artist Felix Ruiz, best known for *Wolverine MAX*. "Felix has already worked with Frank on Batman and has a great sketchy style that somehow isn't the polished or clean art you'd expect for a superhero. It feels more like a horror comic, more dangerous."

## Casting a Web

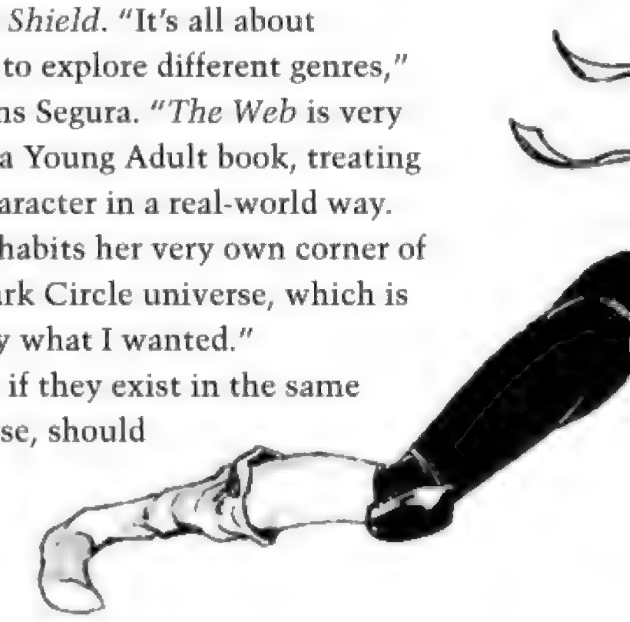
At the other end of the spectrum comes *The Web*. Due in early 2016, the fifth Dark Circle book is written by bestselling author Dave White, with art by *Spawn*'s Szymon Kudranski. "In *The Web* we meet Jane Raymond, a 14-year-old high-schooler who's a devoted fan of a superhero known as The Web. She goes to conventions, cosplaying as her hero, but as you'll see in issue one, ends up gaining abilities and becoming The Web herself."

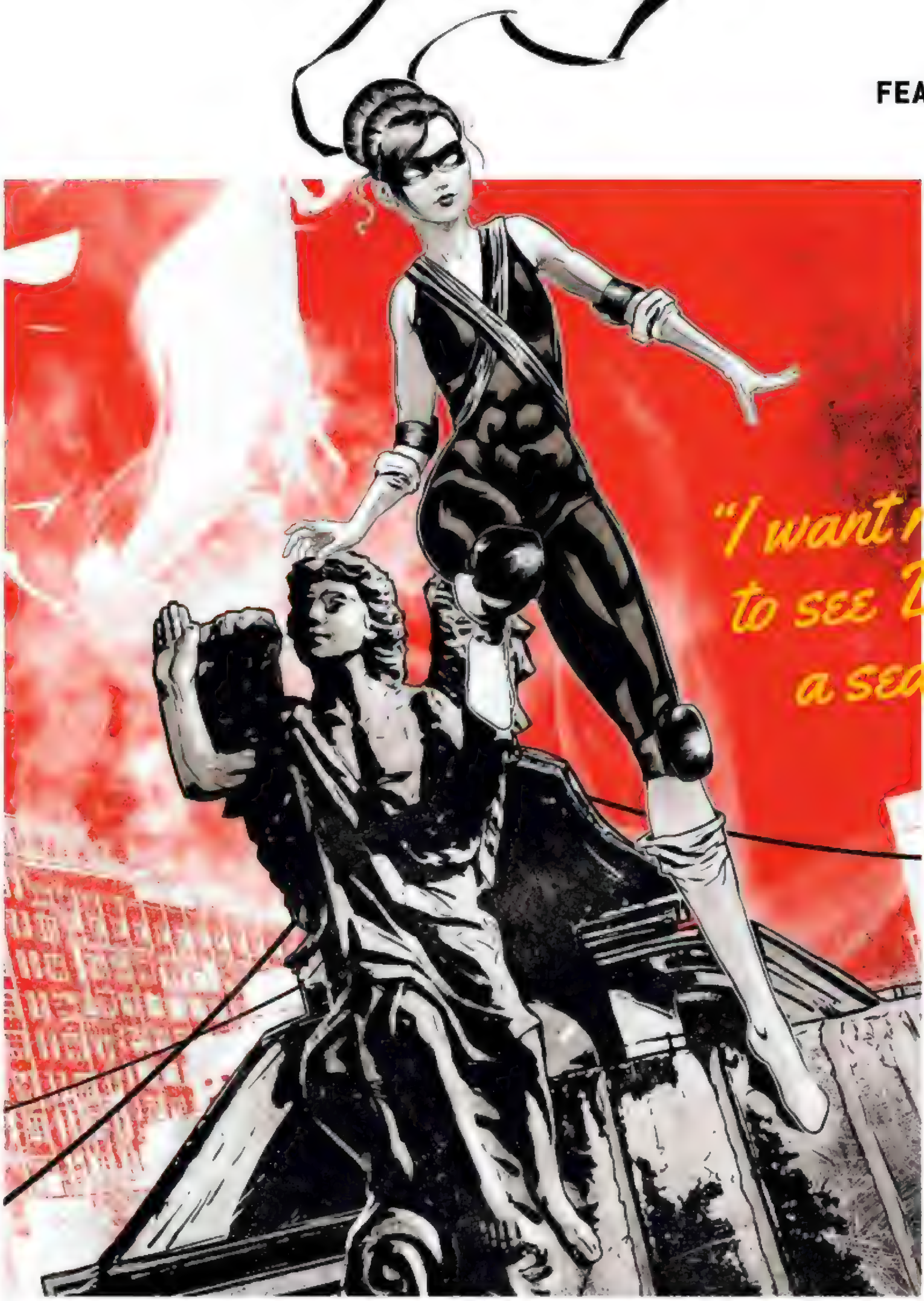
You couldn't get much further away from the dark, dirty world of *Black Hood* or the patriotic exploits of *The Shield*. "It's all about trying to explore different genres," explains Segura. "*The Web* is very much a Young Adult book, treating the character in a real-world way. She inhabits her very own corner of the Dark Circle universe, which is exactly what I wanted."

So, if they exist in the same universe, should we be

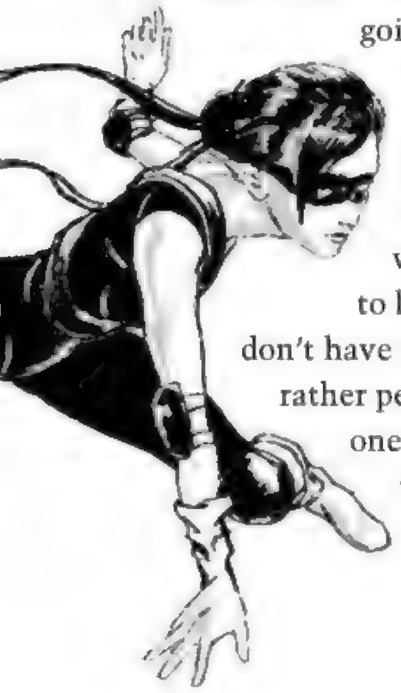
**Above:** *The Web* also revives a character from the earliest days of Archie (or MLJ, as it was then), but again gives it a very different twist.

**Left:** Alex Segura has described *The Hangman* as "Quentin Tarantino adapting a novel by Stephen King."





expecting a Hangman/Web crossover in the near future? Segura says no. "Every book has to breathe on its own. You're certainly not going to see a large "Infinity Gauntlet" style event. First and foremost, we're not in a position where we can compel people to buy everything. We don't have that cachet yet. I'd rather people got engrossed in one comic and decide to try another on their own without me painting them into a corner and saying 'you won't know what happens next unless you buy a different book'.



"As a fan I would get defensive if, while reading *Spider-Man*, I suddenly had to hop over to *Iron Man*. Perhaps I'm projecting that frustration onto our books, but I don't want people to have to read every single title we publish to understand what's going on.

"Yes, you might see a little tip of the hat to *The Black Hood* in *The Shield*, but that's only a little reminder that this is all happening in the same place, rather than something that is constrictive."

Although it has been only nine short months, how would Segura rate his new imprint's success? "The market is so crowded, we could have easily flown under the radar," he admits, "but the reviews have been resoundingly positive, especially for *The Black Hood*. It's shown Dwayne's work in a new light and given Michael a second chance to play in the crime genre. They are one of those pairings that you don't know are going to be special until everyone has a few issues under their belts and you realise that it's going to be perfect."

"I want readers to come to see Dark Circle as a seal of quality"

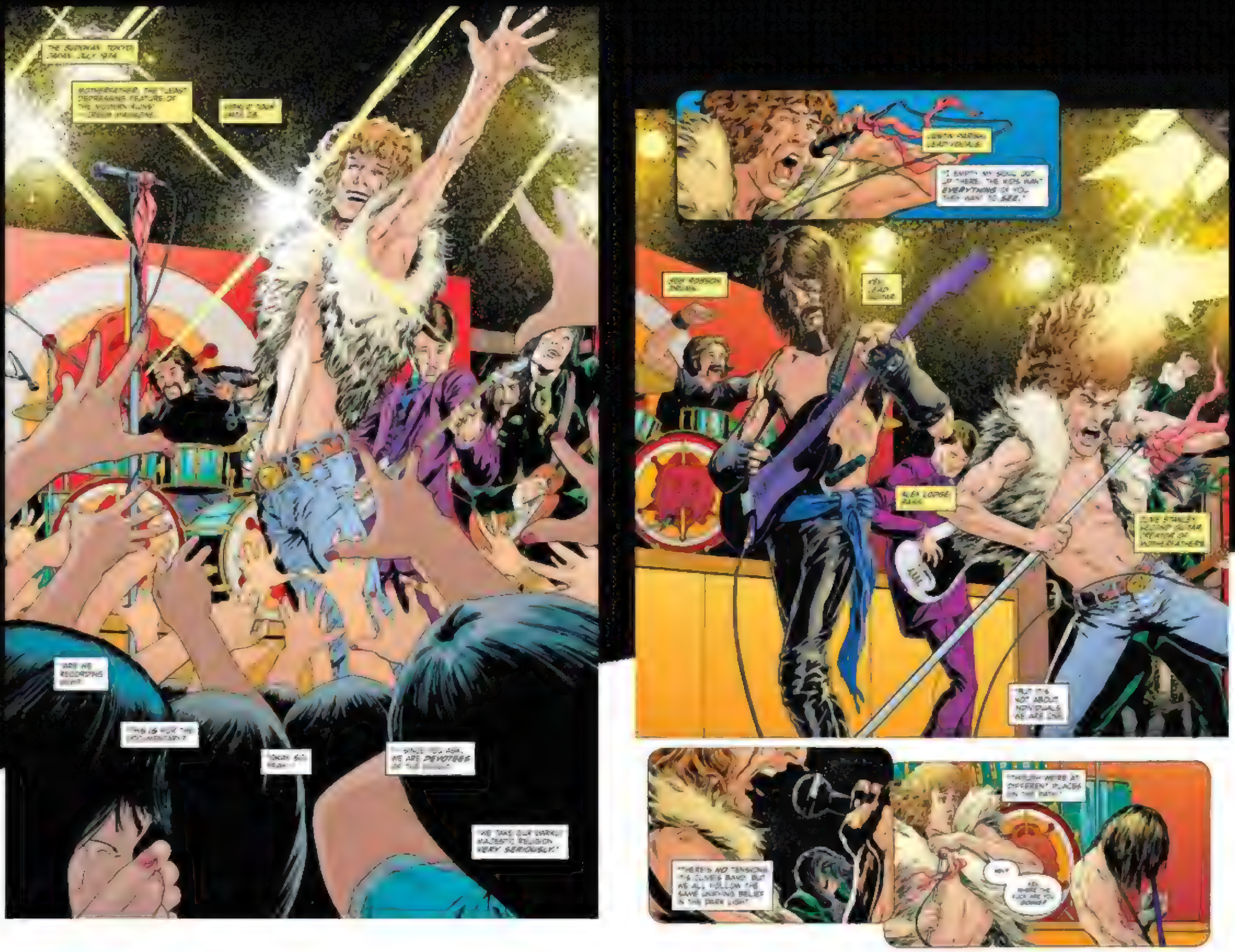
## New light

"It's all happened at a great time too. Comics are in the mainstream in a way they've never been before. People who don't go into a store every week or log onto Comixology still know what's happening with superheroes." The challenge is that those people can be entertained by more media than ever, often getting their superhero kicks from TV, movies and video games rather than the printed page. "The pressure is on to make stories so compelling that they're worth the four dollars you spend on a comic," says Segura. "With our books, I want readers to connect with the title they've chosen and come to see Dark Circle as a seal of quality, to say 'I like *The Shield*, so maybe I'll give *The Black Hood* or *Hangman* a try,' knowing that these books are really carefully curated." CH

**Above:** The 1942 Web was a criminologist and mystery writer seeking to understand the motives and behaviour of criminals. (We're not making this up!) In the 1990s the Web was a network (get it?) of costumed secret agents. The Dark Circle Web is a 14-year-old girl who's into cosplay but gains real powers. Talk about moving with the times!

# THE DEVIL ROCKS OUT

THERE ARE DARK FORCES AT WORK IN THIS DAMNED BAND, DARK HORSE'S NEW HORROR COMEDY. **WILL SALMON** TALKS TO PAUL CORNELL ABOUT MUSIC, MAGICK AND THE MYTHIC APPEAL OF COMICS


"ARE WE RECORDING NOW?"
"WE TAKE OUR DARKLY MAJESTIC RELIGION VERY SERIOUSLY."

Something strange was afoot in the 1970s. As the previous decade's dreams of peace and love crumbled beneath a wave of political turmoil, a strange new trend took hold – something that cultural historian Matthew Sweet calls the "age of Black Aquarius". Suddenly magick, Satanism and the occult were in vogue and *everywhere*, from books to fashion and even children's TV (what other decade could spawn the seriously strange *Sky* or *Children Of The Stones*?). But nowhere were they more prevalent than in the heady, cash-bloated world of rock.

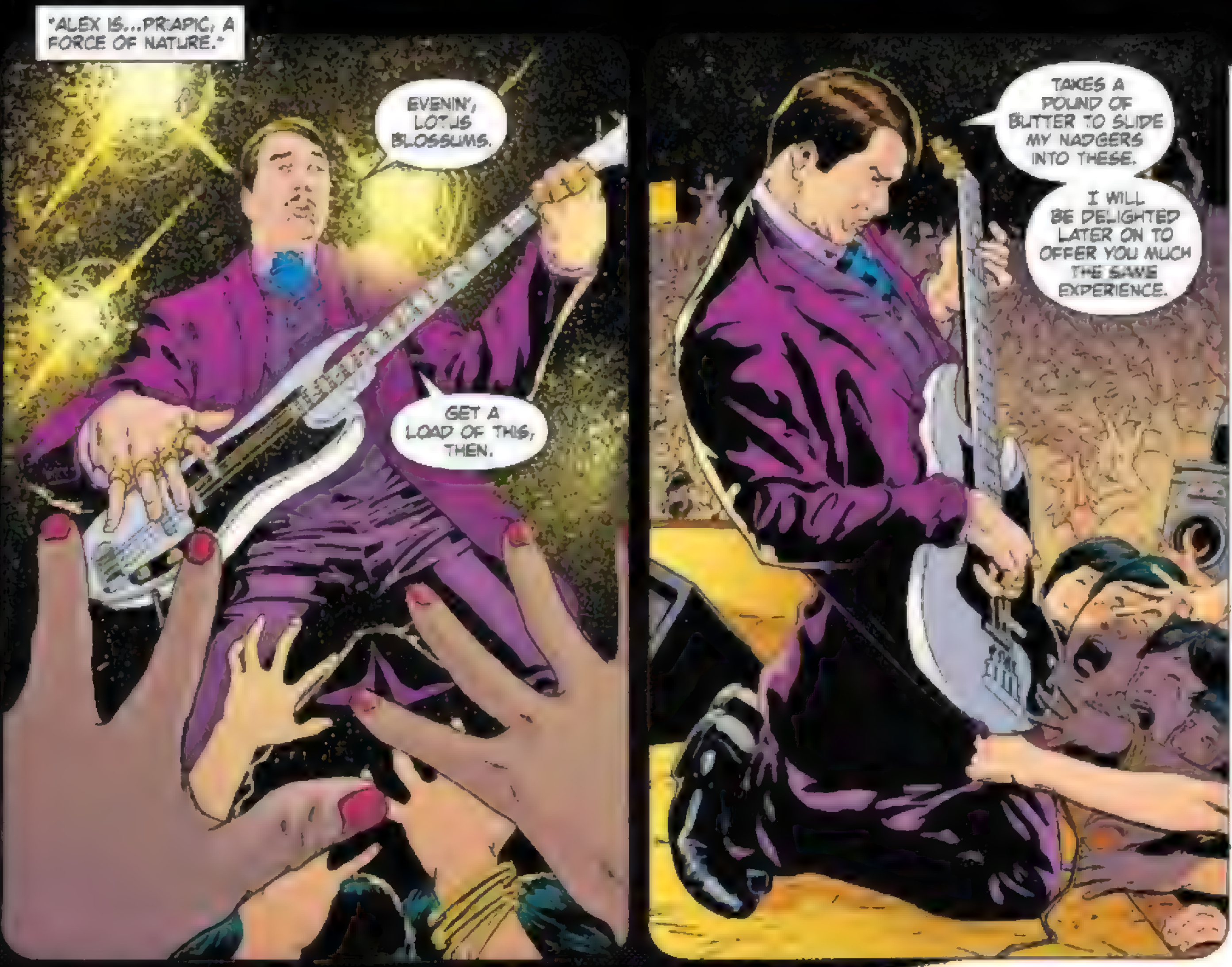
There was poor old David Bowie, lost to drugs and paranoia, immersing himself in the kabbalah and trying to ward off witches. Led Zeppelin declaring their allegiance to Lucifer and carving Aleister Crowley quotations into their vinyl. And, as the decade went on, the seriously sinister sounds of self-confessed industrial occultists, Throbbing Gristle.

To this list, add Motherfather, the fictional protagonists of *This Damned Band*, the six-part series from Paul Cornell, Tony Parker and Lovern Kindzierski. The biggest rock band of 1974, they are self-proclaimed Satanists – and complete frauds. What they don't expect is for Lucifer to then actually show up at one of their gigs… It's all fun and games until somebody loses a soul.

**Above:** *This Damned Band* is told as if we're seeing a film crew making a documentary about the band. Dark Horse is promoting it as "*Spinal Tap* meets *Ghostbusters*". It's rude and funny and definitely not for kids.

"I just wanted to look at people who suddenly find out that something they'd taken to be a fiction is horribly true," Paul told us. It's the day after Titan's Doctor Who Day (see page 87), the first issue of *This Damned Band* has been on sale for a few weeks, and it's already drawn an enthusiastic response. "We've had brilliant reviews. I think people have really cottoned on to what we're doing.

"My model for this was the way that, for a brief period in the mid '70s, loads of people in rock


"ALEX IS...PRIAPIC, A FORCE OF NATURE."
EVENIN', LOTUS BLOSSUMS.
GET A LOAD OF THIS, THEN.
TAKES A POUND OF BUTTER TO SLIDE MY NADGERS INTO THESE.
I WILL BE DELIGHTED LATER ON TO OFFER YOU MUCH THE SAME EXPERIENCE.

bands were supposedly gay. Mick Jagger used to insist he was gay and having an affair with David Bowie! And Bowie himself – whether or not he was even vaguely bisexual is open to question. But what if one of their other pretensions turned out to actually be true?"

Motherfather don't seem like committed devotees of the dark arts. There's space cadet frontman Justin, domesticated guitarist Kev, sex pest bassist Alex, archetypal drummer Bob and sidelined original member Clive. "The sheer amount of money slopping around in rock in the 1970s meant that every small gesture became exaggerated. Band members' personalities were exaggerated too."

In hindsight, the occult fad feels like a blip in history. "You could buy a black mass as a two volume LP set! It was extraordinary. And Dennis Wheatley, who was this 1920s potboiler author, suddenly becomes an international bestseller. You just cannot imagine Marvel doing a comic called *Son of Satan* now, can you?"

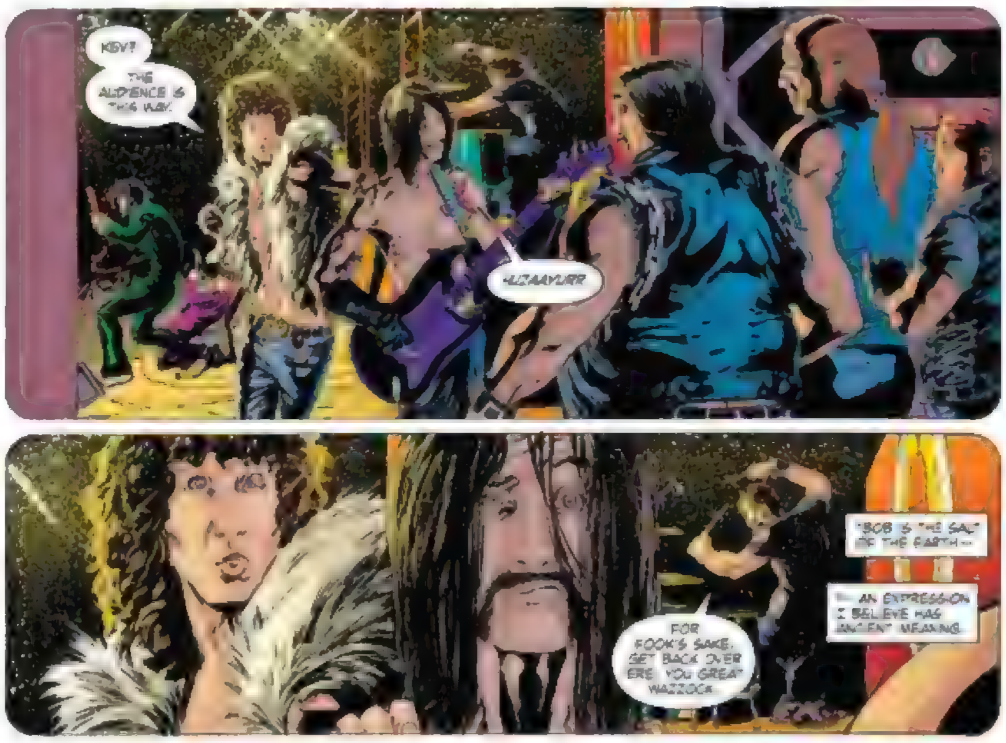
But why did the culture turn inwards to the esoteric? "I think it was a reaction to the violence of the decade – everything from Vietnam to Baader-Meinhof. People were seeing in their living rooms, for the first time, scenes of extreme violence. And judging by the levels of lead in the air back then, a lot of people have said that there might even be a chemical basis for that violence.

"I remember that feeling. I remember sitting in my dad's insurance office in a tiny town in Wiltshire and being surrounded by threatening skinheads – who'd presumably come in to check their life policy! The generation that came along after World War II, the hippie generation, thought utopia was on the way, and that went sour *so* fast and those ideas just hit the ground. With that and the economic collapse and the violence, you can sort of see why a lot of people started looking into the darker corners of the occult."

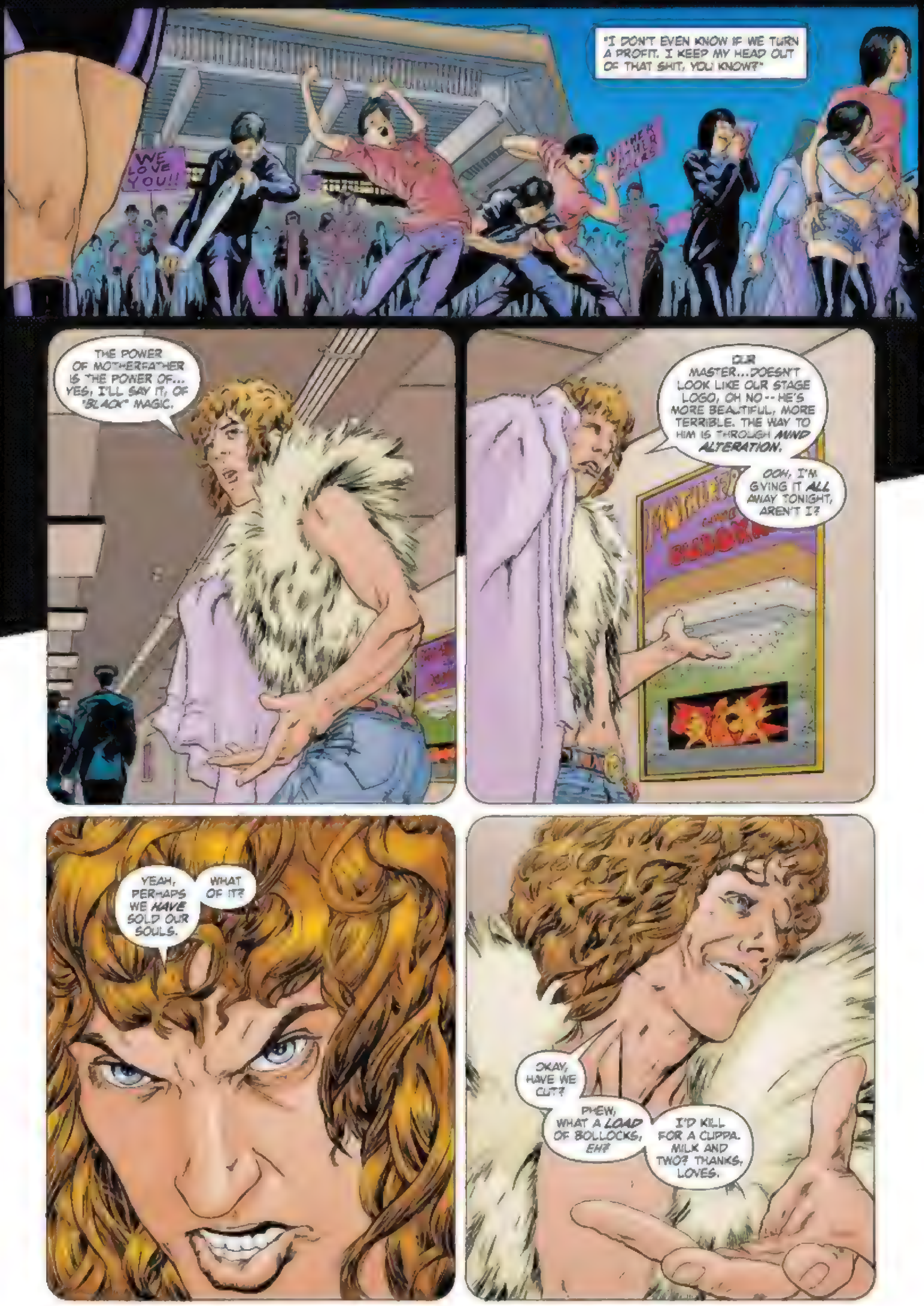
## DABBLERS AND DEVOTEES

Was there anything more to it than just a bit of spooky glamour? Were any of these bands sincere in their beliefs? "I find the occultism of those times quite charmingly naive and romantic, actually," Paul laughs. "They're certainly worshipping a Lucifer who is misunderstood. They're basically worshipping a good god, a god of light who they have clothed in a Luciferian dress to allow themselves to feel slightly cooler. But then there were also people like Crowley, whose work I'm fascinated by and who I think is a genuinely interesting student of the human psyche. A conman, to a certain extent, but a good one, and those >

**This page:** Paul Cornell says this black comedy takes swipes at specific targets, "with our band as avatars of many different rock legends." Any resemblance to persons living or dead... is purely satirical.


KEV?
THE AUDIENCE IS THIS WAY.
HUZAAYURR
"BOB IS THE SALT OF THE EARTH –
... AN EXPRESSION I BELIEVE HAS ANCIENT MEANING.
FOR FOOK'S SAKE, GET BACK OVER ERE, YOU GREAT WAZZOCK.

ALL IMAGES © PAUL CORNELL, TONY PARKER & LOVERN KINDZIERSKI


"I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF WE TURN A PROFIT. I KEEP MY HEAD OUT OF THAT SHIT, YOU KNOW?"
WE LOVE YOU!!
THE POWER OF MOTHERFATHER IS THE POWER OF... YES, I'LL SAY IT, OF "BLACK" MAGIC.
OUR MASTER...DOESN'T LOOK LIKE OUR STAGE LOGO, OH NO -- HE'S MORE BEAUTIFUL, MORE TERRIBLE. THE WAY TO HIM IS THROUGH MIND ALTERATION.
OOH, I'M GIVING IT ALL AWAY TONIGHT, AREN'T I?
YEAH, PERHAPS WE HAVE SOLD OUR SOULS.
WHAT OF IT?
OKAY, HAVE WE CUT?
PHEW, WHAT A LOAD OF BOLLOCKS, EH?
I'D KILL FOR A CUPPA. MILK AND TWO? THANKS, LOVES.

**Above:** What happens when a band who claim they're, you know, *worshipping* Satan find that they're actually, you know, *worshipping Satan*? Admit it, it's a question you've always wanted to see tackled.

two things are not incompatible with each other.

"Do you know about the Oath of the Abyss?" Paul asks, suddenly. "It's an oath that Crowley made certain people take, which he said was guaranteed to send anyone insane. It's very simple: you swear to find meaning in everything that happens. I don't think I would last a day! But isn't it interesting that he conceived and formulated and codified something so seditious and dangerous in the human psyche as a question? That sums him up, really. He's a genuinely interesting figure."

Comics themselves have a long history with the occult. There's Grant Morrison, perhaps the most outspoken writer of his generation on the subject and Alan Moore who, on the eve of his 50th birthday, declared himself a practising magician. And as a subject matter it's everywhere. You'll rarely find an issue of *2000 AD* these days with no occult themed strip; Kieron Gillen's *Phonogram* mixes music with magic, and Marvel's *Dr Strange* is soon to conquer cinema screens with *Sherlock* himself, Benedict Cumberbatch, fulfilling the role of the sorceror supreme.

## THE POWER OF ARCHETYPES

What's the link? "I think it's the business of archetypes. So many of us have had encounters or contact experiences with what we think of as otherworldly powers, myself in an Anglican context. I was also a Wiccan practitioner and I never fell out of love with that. They are very much about using the power of archetypes to heal oneself. It's not as simple as 'I wish I was Superman and could beat the bullies'. It's reading Chris Claremont's *X-Men* when I was in particularly bad places as a kid. That healed something inside of me using the power of archetypes. Superhero comic writing and magick are not very far divorced from each other. I think that explains a lot about Grant, Alan and maybe me too."

Is the devil in *This Damned Band* the Christian devil? Has Cornell worked out the cosmology to this universe? "To some degree. I asked for something scary and not horns and a tail and all that from Tony. And I mentioned multiple faces, because I was thinking of one of the angels from Revelation who has a sword for a tongue. He's provided the visual of that devil very well. I don't myself believe in a sentient form of evil. I think there are people who are shit. But in fictional terms I wanted to present the band with something that was much more than they were expecting and actually disconnected enough from fictional versions they would have seen."

So this isn't a Hammer horror evil? "He communicates with the band, but he's obviously a step up from what they can deal with. And he remains very much in the background until the awful things play out, so they're never quite sure of the reality of the situation they're in until too late."

## HELL IS (NOT) OTHER PEOPLE

Aside from the cosmic weirdness, *This Damned Band* is a very character-led comic. There's the band, of course, and also the women who surround them – wives and groupies, mostly, but well developed, and dealing with this situation very differently from the band. "They're hugely ignored by most of the band members. Summerflower, the groupie who is into the mystic, she knows what's going on way before the band do, but they continually ignore and don't even register what she's saying to them. This is all about men missing their better judgement and missing the better judgement of other people. Summerflower's magic comes to be really important, especially in the haunted chateau scenes..."

And how about the camera crew who are filming all of the craziness as it goes down? To what extent will we get to know them? "We're going to see them when things get really fraught. We always remember that they're there and that they might be affected by what's in front of them." Cornell has spoken in the past of sitcom *Parks and Recreation* as a direct influence on the series. "In *Parks and Rec* they let themselves do impossible things from time to time, like having scenes with people alone in the middle of the forest, but we don't do that. We remember that people are there holding the cameras. Tony is very good at remembering how many cameras they've got and how many different angles they can take and things like that."

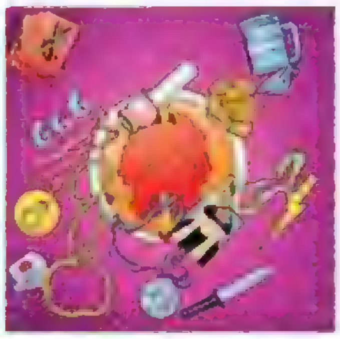
How did their collaboration come about? "Dark Horse gave me a selection of three or four artists and I loved what they showed >

> "SUPERHERO COMIC WRITING AND MAGICK ARE NOT FAR DIVORCED FROM EACH OTHER. I THINK THAT EXPLAINS A LOT"

## THE DEVIL'S IN THE DETAIL

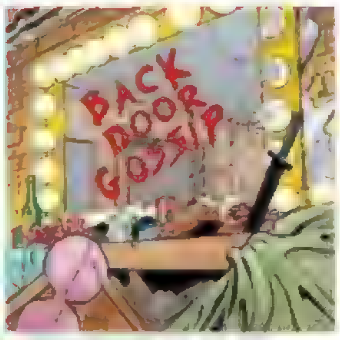
**If *Spinal Tap* set the bar for detail, *Band* rises to the challenge...**

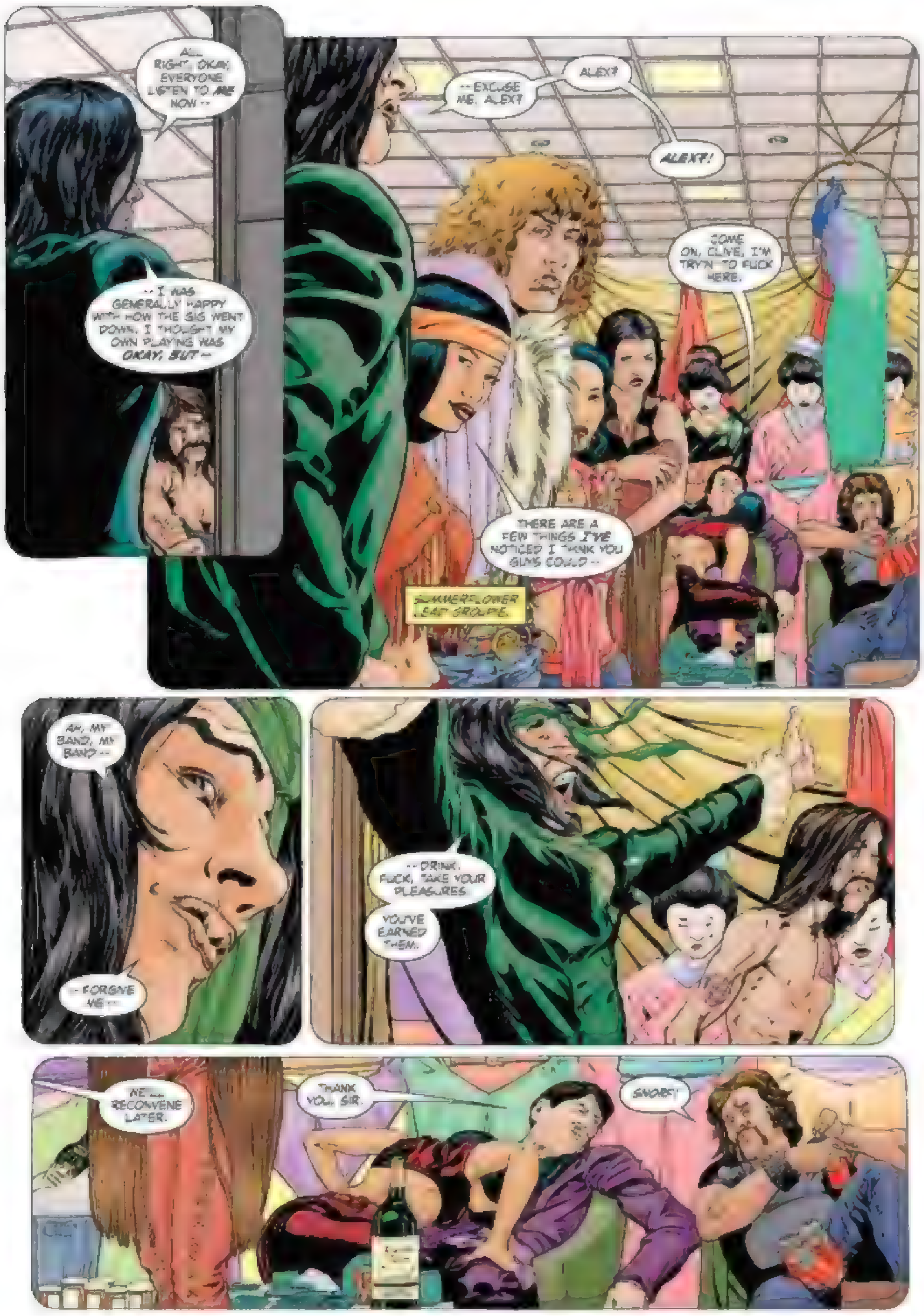
**Before he appears in the flesh, we see the devil on the band's drum kit...**
"Oh yes, he's their logo come to life. And if you look at the discography, the logo appears in lots of different places."



**Did you have fun creating the extra details like the band's albums?**
"Oh, I loved it. I wrote little descriptions of what each album cover looked like and Tony came up with these wonderful pastiche covers. Then the design department at Dark Horse came up with the logos, which were even more wonderful. I really enjoyed that. It's really important doing stuff like that which feels authentic for people who know their classic rock."

**There's a lot of attention to detail.**
"Everything Dark Horse has done with the presentation has been wonderful. That t-shirt ad in the back was entirely by Dark Horse. It was nothing to do with us, and it's so spot-on. A lot of people have asked, 'Can we get the t-shirt?' and we're looking into that now!"




ALL RIGHT, OKAY, EVERYONE LISTEN TO *ME* NOW --
--I WAS GENERALLY HAPPY WITH HOW THE GIG WENT DOWN. I THOUGHT MY OWN PLAYING WAS *OKAY, BUT* --
--EXCUSE ME, ALEX?
ALEX?
*ALEX?!*
COME ON, CLIVE, I'M TRYN' TO FUCK HERE.
THERE ARE A FEW THINGS *I'VE* NOTICED I THINK YOU GUYS COULD --
SUMMERFLOWER LEAD GROUPIE.
AH, MY BAND, MY BAND --
--FORGIVE ME --
--DRINK, FUCK, TAKE YOUR PLEASURES.
YOU'VE EARNED THEM.
WE'LL RECONVENE LATER.
THANK YOU, SIR.
SNORT!

**This page:** Paul is full of praise for artist Tony Parker's skill at depicting characters who fit the place and time. "Tony's wry, expressive character work, sense of comic timing and ability to change styles contribute hugely to the effect."

> I LOVE SEEING HOW AN ARTIST HAS BUILT ON WHAT I DESCRIBED AND BROUGHT NEW THINGS TO THE TABLE

me of his. He looked incredibly versatile and that's turned out to be the case. You should hear Tony talk about his fashion research and the way people looked then. He's gone for '70s beauty as well. Aesthetic standards have changed in people as well as fashion. Not only have these guys been clothed correctly, they are also the sort of people who would have risen to fame on the basis of their looks at the time. And Lovern, the colourist, the way that he can add to a scene with a very '70s palette..."

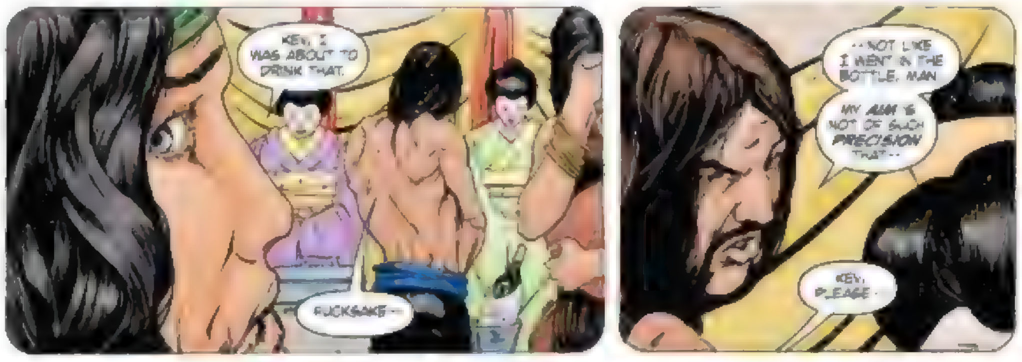
Will Motherfather end up in heaven or hell? Paul's not saying. But he's excited about what's next for him: a new graphic novel set in the *World Of Warcraft* movie universe. *Bonds Of Brotherhood* comes out in mid 2016, drawn by Mat Broome and published by Legendary Pictures' own imprint, Legendary Comics. "I really enjoyed doing that. It's the prologue to the movie and features characters who are in it. I can't say who they are!"

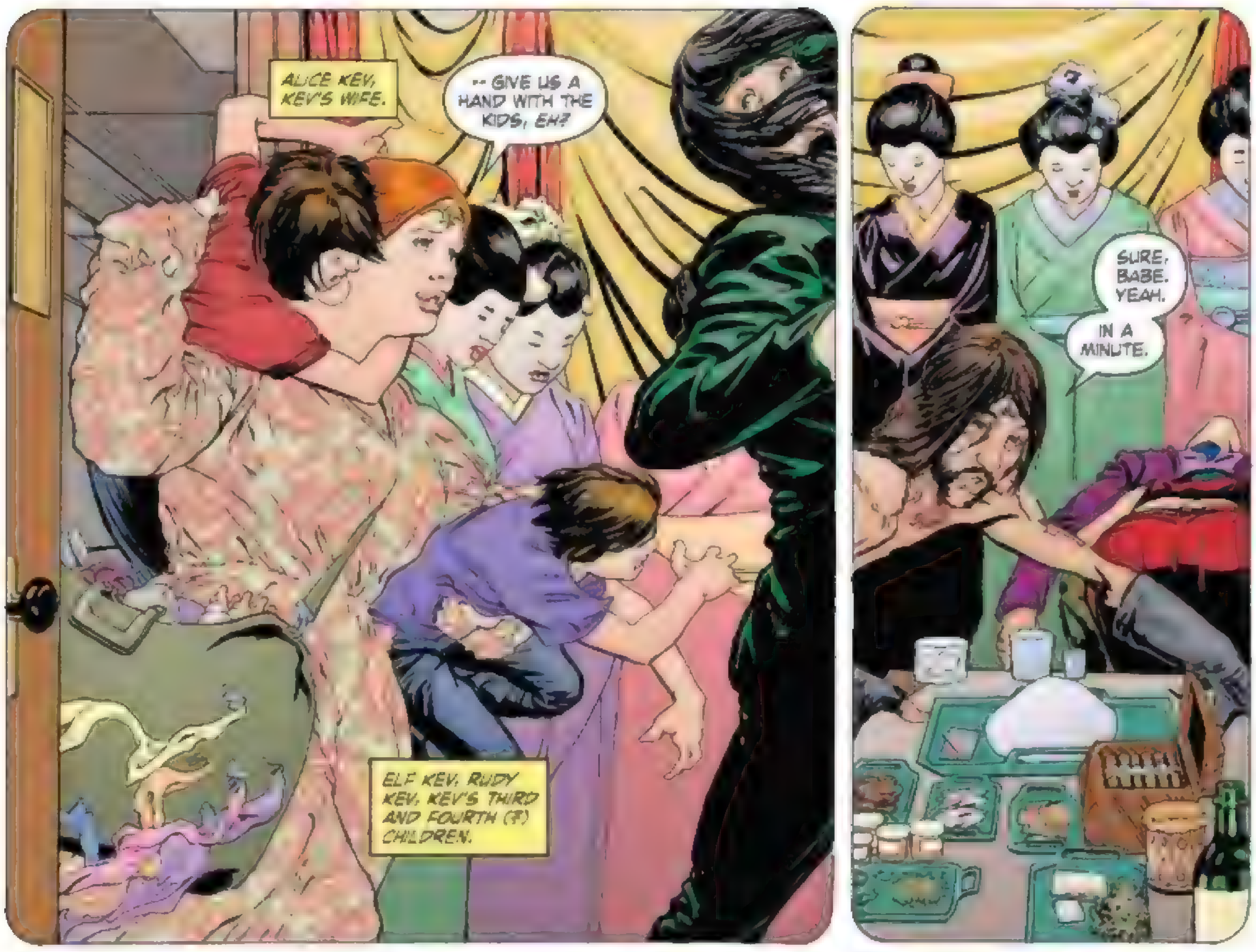
The big question about that film, of course, is: will it be any good? After all, video games adaptations haven't exactly had a stellar hit rate so far. "I've seen the movie in an early version and it's *incredible*," Paul reveals. "It's got a *Star Wars*-y vibe to it. It's a really accessible, highly emotional, highly character-based fantasy movie – and how often do you get that? It feels ready. It's got that wholeness, that satisfyingness of something like *Lord Of The Rings*. It's Duncan Jones, who I met and talked to briefly about this. Mat's had wonderful access to draw the various characters and monsters involved." This itself could be seen as a tenuous link back to *This Damned Band* – well, if you squint a bit. Duncan Jones is, of course, the son of David Bowie.

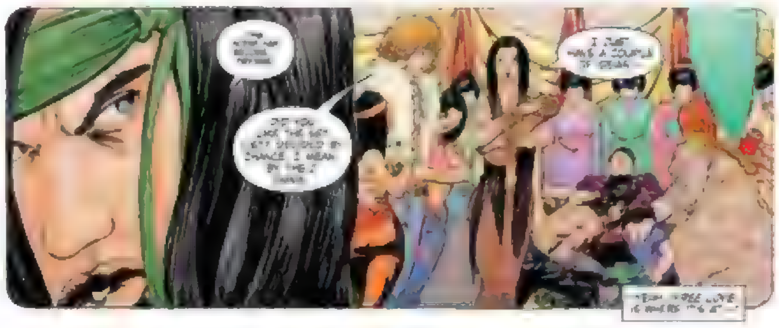
## TAKING COMICS SERIOUSLY

Cornell's career has been long been diverse. There's *Doctor Who*, of course, of which he remains a passionate fan. After a couple of early false starts, his novels have broken through with the *Shadow Police* series, *London Falling* and its sequel, *The Severed Streets*, winning a new fanbase. But he keep coming back to comics.

"I like working with a small team," he explains. "You can


KEV, I WAS ABOUT TO DRINK THAT.
FUCKSAKE --
--NOT LIKE I WENT IN THE BOTTLE, MAN
MY *AIM* IS NOT OF SUCH *PRECISION* THAT --
KEV, PLEASE --


ALICE KEV, KEV'S WIFE.
-- GIVE US A HAND WITH THE KIDS, EH?
ELF KEV. RUDY KEV. KEV'S THIRD AND FOURTH (?) CHILDREN.
SURE, BABE. YEAH.
IN A MINUTE.



**Above:** The series is "a depiction of how extreme the life of a touring band was back then, with some big emotions at its heart," Paul says. "It's also often *very silly*. As well as sometimes disturbing, and sometimes quite tender. I hope it rocks."

make tiny adjustments at the last moment – changing a little bit of dialogue to suit an expression. It's you, the artist, the colourist and the editor, and that's a really good feeling. I love getting pages of art in my inbox and seeing how an artist has built on what I have described."

But what is it about the medium that's so special? What keeps him excited about comics? "If television and film are pared-down life, are taking a selection of scenes out of what might be seen as the stream of reality and cutting in the right places to create an effect, then comics are even more precise. You have to choose single images and cut between them at the right points. I think that with every movement down to a finer grain, something is gained. So, from streaming reality to long cuts in cinema and television to single images in comics, I think our brain is engaged in a different way. You can feel the beat of the number of panels per page in a comic, as Alan Moore proved so famously, and you can influence the reader in many unconscious ways, such as setting up in the last panel [on a page] an expectation of what's going to be the first thing on the page turn.

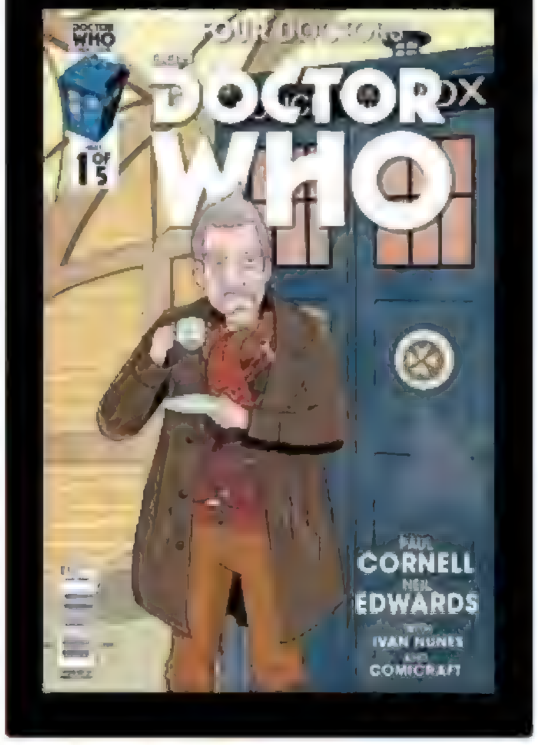
"I really enjoy artists who will break the unconscious visual grammar of a page setup in order to disturb the reader. One of the easiest ways to do that is to have characters run off into the distance on the right-hand page, in the bottom left-hand corner. It feels disturbing, there's a sense of wrongness about it! I think there's a level of control that's possible in comics that you get in very few places. The more we unearth of what comics artists in particular are doing instinctively and unconsciously and the more we bring into open skill sets, the better. There may be a lot more to discover and a lot more ways of doing things." CH

## DOCTOR WHO

**You've just finished writing Titan's *Four Doctors* crossover, correct?**
"Actually, I just did a little tweak to two last pages on the last issue tonight, and that should be it. I think Neil finishes drawing it on Monday, so there we are. It's a lovely feeling."

**How was Titan's Doctor Who day yesterday?**
"It was brilliant. I signed 1,000 copies of the Marc Ellerby variant [of *The Four Doctors* #1]. Marc had to change his signature halfway through when he realised the size of the task in front of him! It was nice to be part of something so global. I did three events in London in a day. Just an amazing thing."

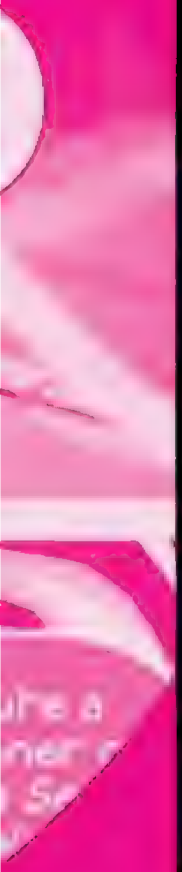
**You're now one of the few people to write officially for the War Doctor...**
"He's only in the first six pages, the prologue in the first issue, but it was interesting. One has to think of things that are John Hurt-ish because there's a smaller range of material to draw from. I've got him saying 'lads', which I can hear John Hurt saying but can't really imagine any of the other Doctors saying."



Jon
Wuh happneed Jon...?
Isn't it obvious?
Yo
priso
th
p

# ALTERED IMAGE

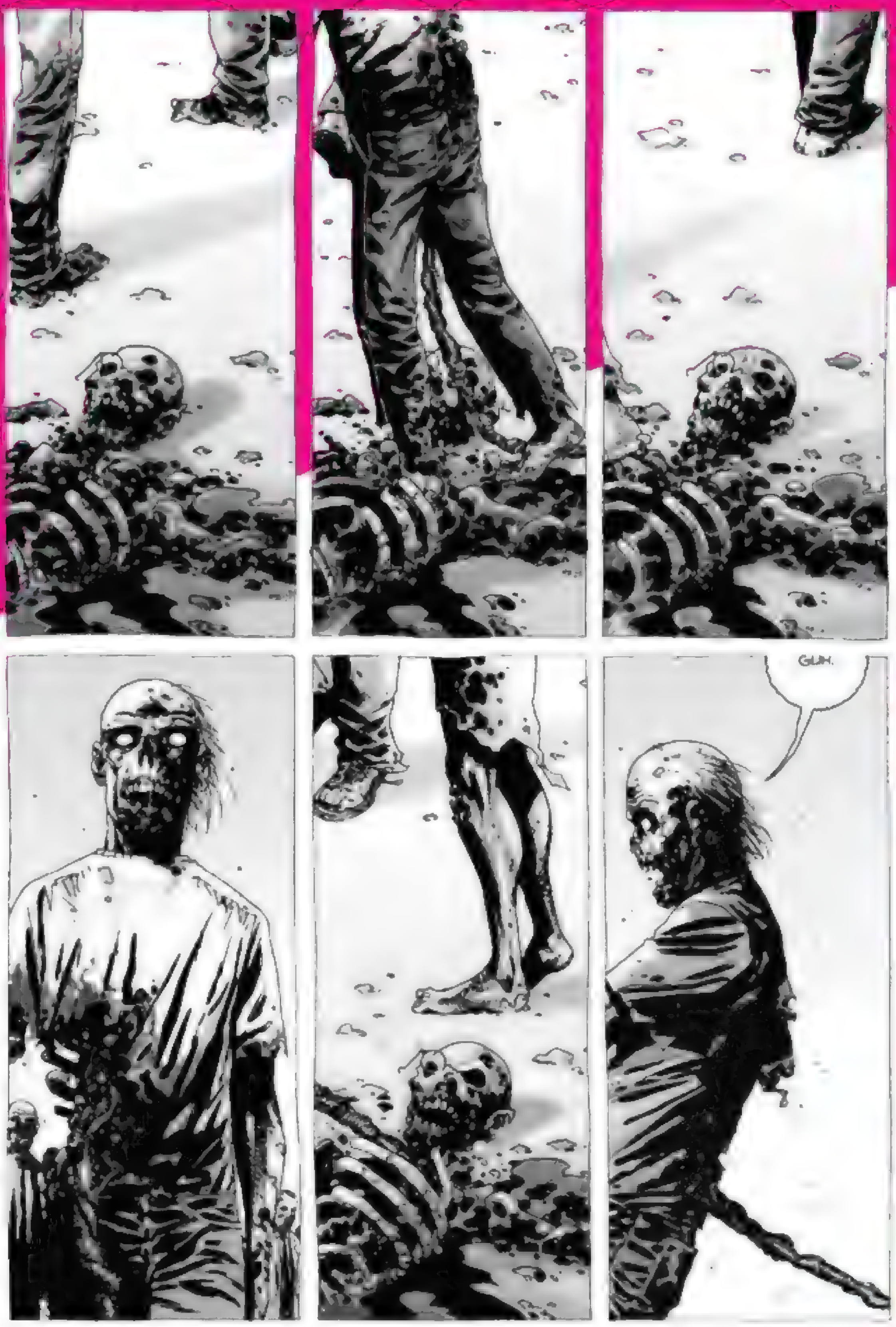
### IT WAS THE LITTLE COMPANY THE BIG TWO LAUGHED AT. NOW **IMAGE** IS HOME TO SOME OF THE COOLEST COMICS ON THE STANDS. **STEPHEN KELLY** FINDS OUT MORE...

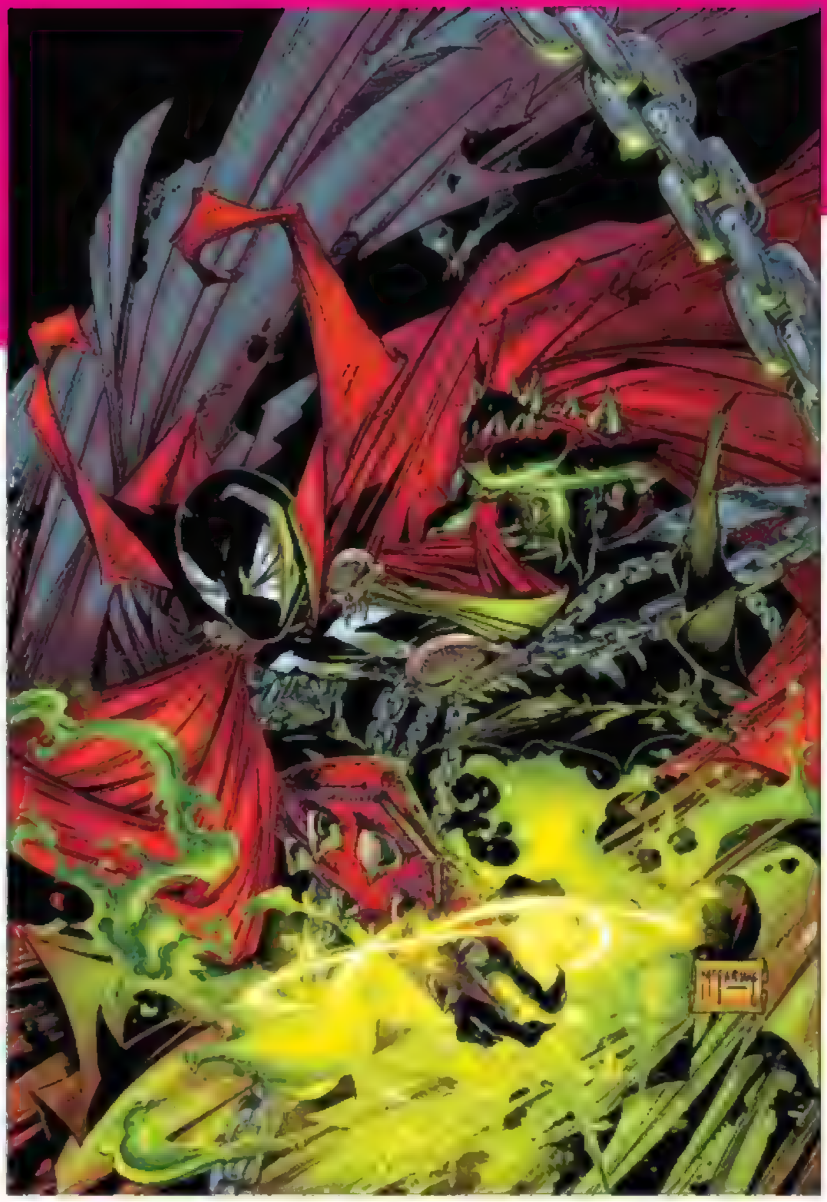


In 1933, two teenagers from Cleveland – writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster – created a character called Superman. You might have heard of him. Five years later they sold him to Detective Comics – later to become DC Comics – for $130 ($10 a page) and a contract to work for the company. They made a living for several years, admittedly, but realised as early as 1941 that they had lost control over their creation, who had already birthed an entire industry. In 1946 they sued, and lost. They sued again in 1967. And lost. Both fell on hard times. In 1975, by which time Shuster was legally blind, a number of prominent figures in the comics industry took up their cause. Fearing adverse publicity with the first Superman movie imminent, DC settled, granting Siegel and Shuster creator credit and a pension for life, but not ownership.

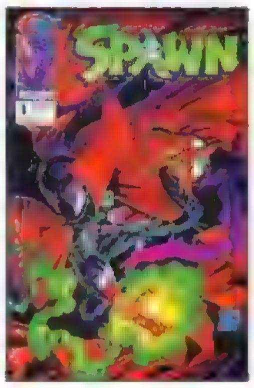
Fast-forward to the mid 1960s, and Jack Kirby – one of the most influential ➧

THE WALKING DEAD 2015 IMAGE COMICS AND 2015 SKYBOUND LLC ALL RIGHTS RESERVED





THE WALKING DEAD



**Above:** Todd McFarlane's *Spawn* was Image's first mega-hit, but *The Walking Dead* eclipsed even *Spawn*, becoming a cultural phenomenon in multiple media – and providing Image with a very large war chest to bankroll future projects.

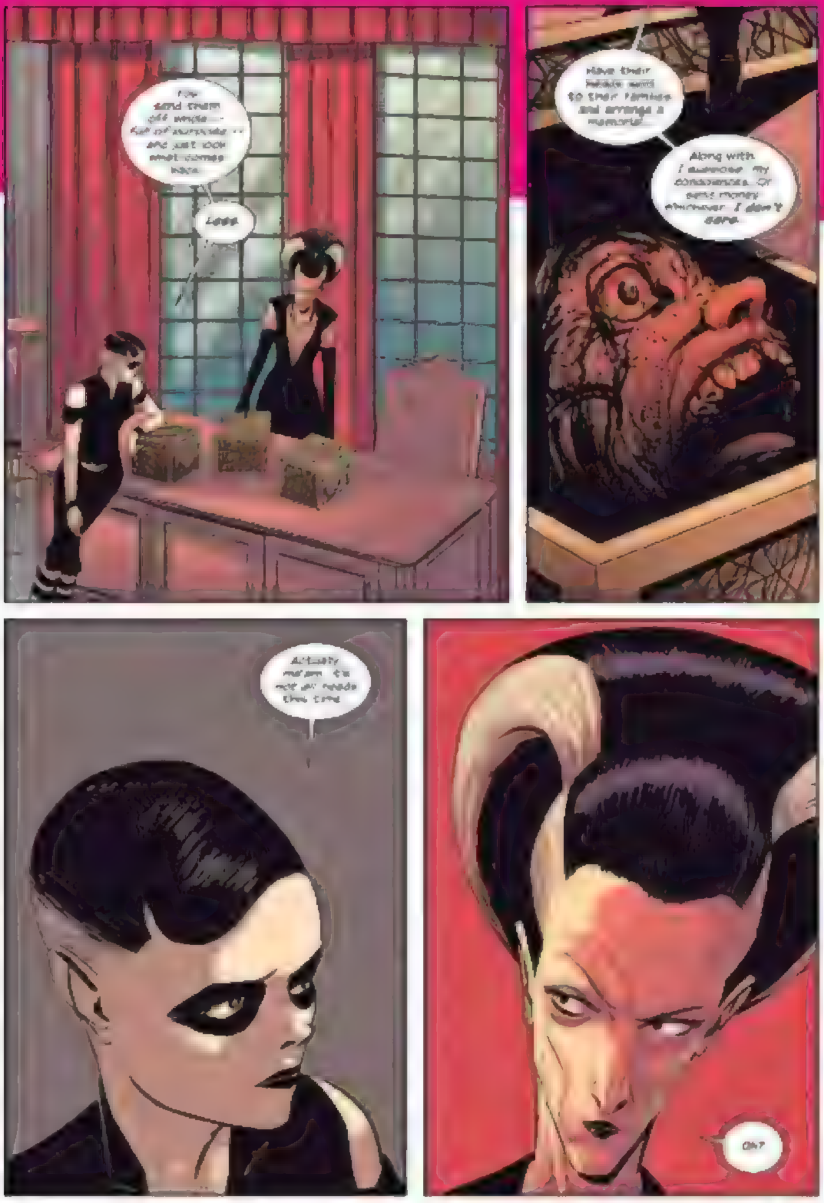
artists in comic book history – has co-created our entire culture: the Fantastic Four, Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, the X-Men, the Hulk. No one back then could have foreseen that Marvel movies would make a combined $18 billion at the box office by 2015, but Marvel was making millions from Kirby's creations even then and he received no royalties. He worked to pay his bills right up to his death in 1994.

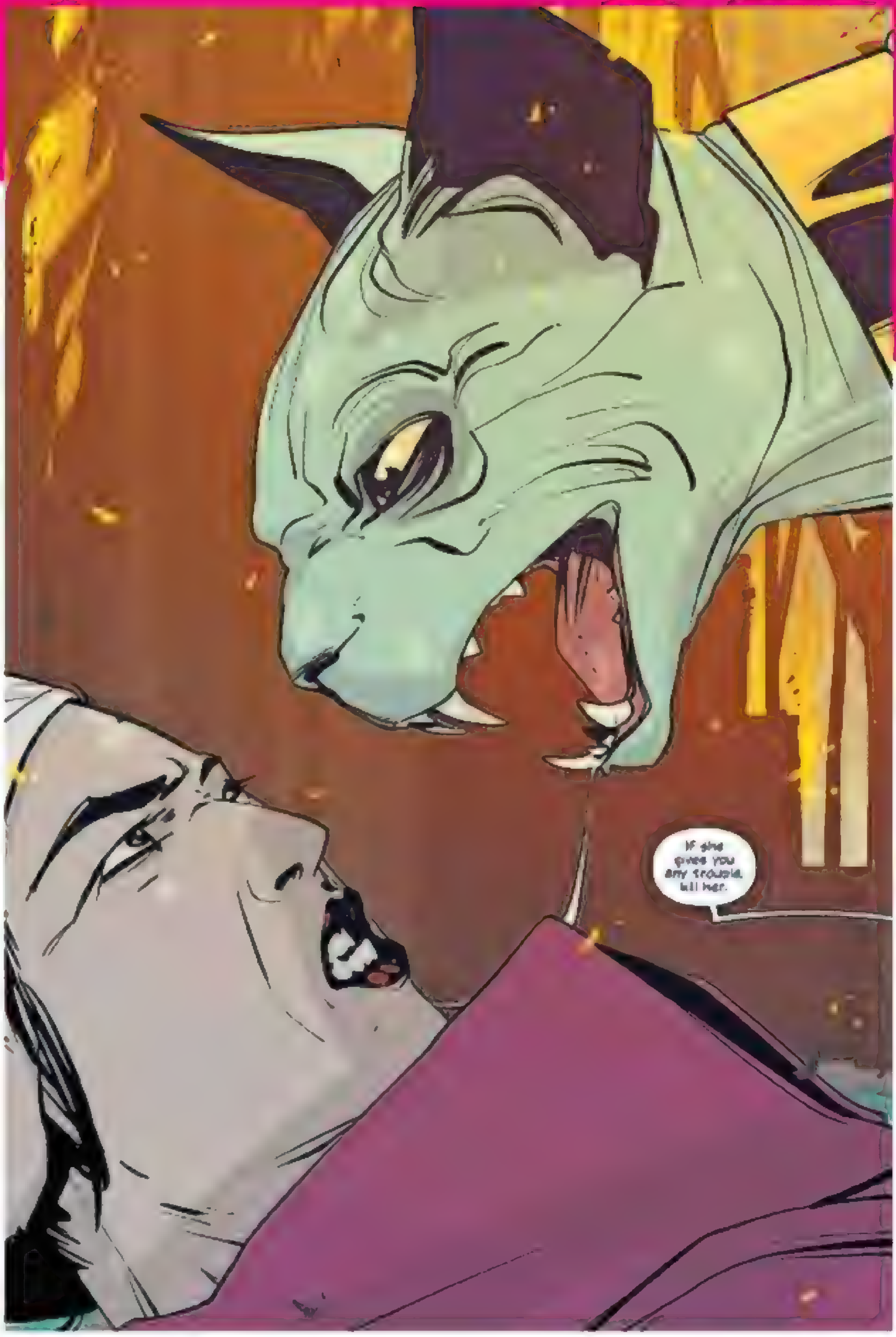
In 1981, both Marvel and DC started paying bonuses to creators of top-selling titles, but characters created under a company banner remained fully-owned by the company, not the creator. In 1991, however, something changed: fans had started to pay attention to who created a comic rather than who starred in it – making a select few creators not just a byline but the main attraction. This shift gave seven of Marvel's core creators – Todd McFarlane, Jim Lee, Erik Larsen, Jim Valentino, Rob Liefeld, Marc Silvestri and Whilce Portacio – the means to make a stand. They sensationally left *en masse* to form their own company: Image Comics. (To put this into perspective, those seven were behind the top-selling 44 comics released that entire year.)

Image's ideology was – and still is – very simple: creators own their work. At the time, Image was seen as a vanity project, with critics betting on how soon it would all collapse. It didn't. Forming their own studios under the Image umbrella, the seven went on to success with titles such as *Savage Dragon*, *WildC.A.T.s*, *Youngblood* and Todd McFarlane's ludicrously successful *Spawn*, the first issue of

> ❝ Most of the money goes right back to the creators. Image takes a cut but is still there to facilitate creators ❞

storemags.com


Have their heads sent to their families and arrange a memorial.
Along with, I suppose, my condolences. Or send money whichever. I don't care.
Less.
Oh?


If she gives you any trouble, kill her.

which sold 1.7 million copies. As for vanity: sure. But what began as a stand for themselves became an entirely new way of doing things. Suddenly you didn't have to work for either of the two big companies – you could become the company.

## FACILITATING CREATORS

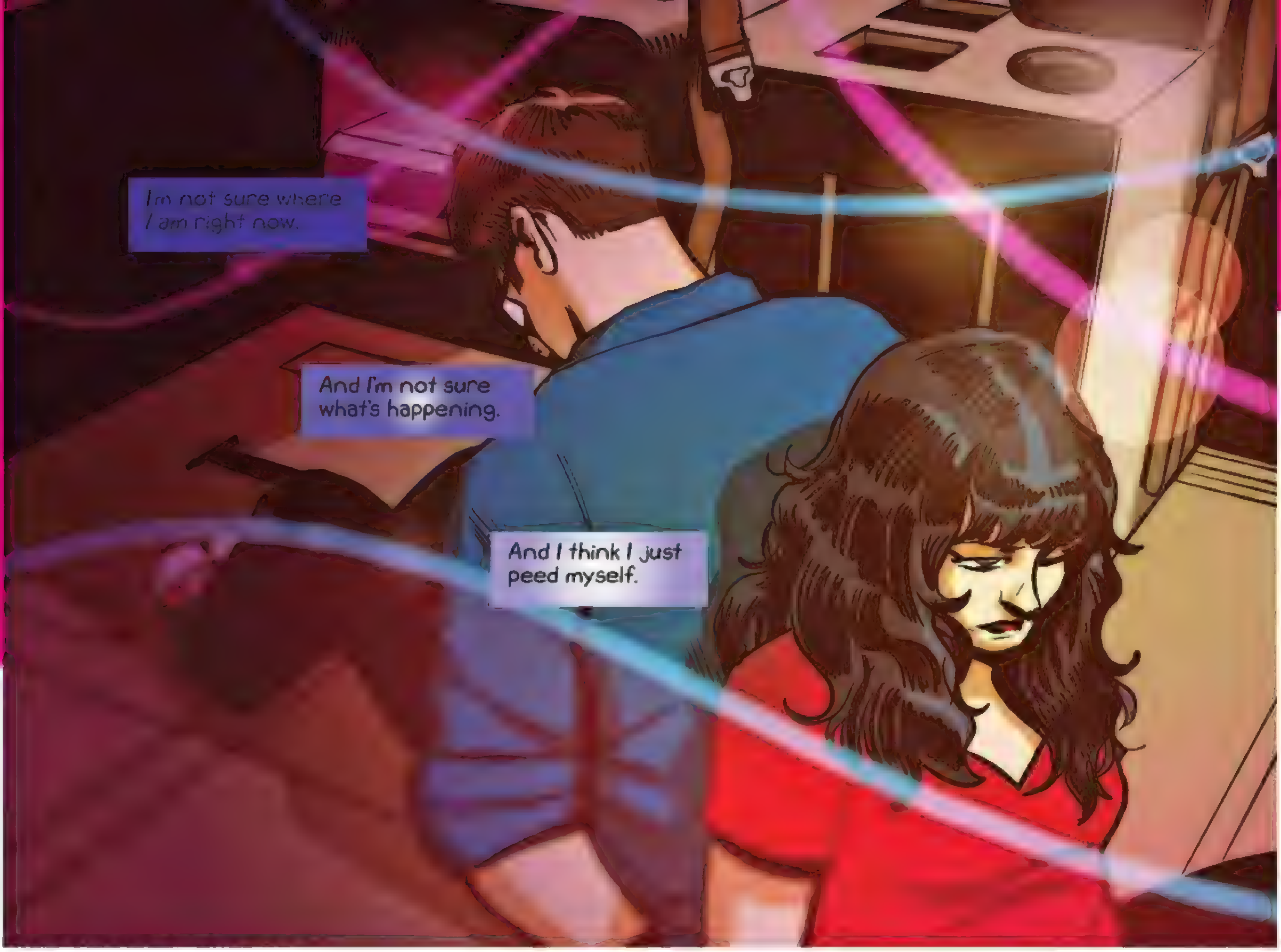
"It's about as close as to a not-for-profit setup as they can get," says Chip Zdarsky, the artist behind *Sex Criminals*, published by Image. "Most of the money goes right back to the creators. Image take a certain amount of money to cover their office fees, and a percentage on paperbacks, which is not nothing. But still they're there to facilitate creators, instead of creators facilitating a publisher. A book at Image either thrives or dies based on the creators. I think that's the key to their success."

"No other company compares to Image in terms of what is offered to creators (ie freedom and control)," adds *Rat Queens'* artist Tess Fowler, "and therefore no other company has as much of a chance of wedging open the doors of change."

Kieron Gillen, writer of *Phonogram* and *The Wicked + The Divine*, likens Image to Factory Records, the idealist '80s label that gave musicians ownership of their back-catalogues, bringing us Joy Division, New Order and Happy Mondays in the process. The likeness, he says, stretches to "how fast and loose Image is in making decisions. Jonathan Hickman's original story is kind of typical. He did the entire first issue of [his first Image comic] *The Nightly News*, sent it in and Image went, 'Yeah, we'll publish this!' So his pitch was basically 'Here is the comic!'"

"I had a similar response when I pitched *Kaptara* to them," laughs Zdarsky, "and two minutes later the publisher goes, 'Alright, let's do this!' And I was all, 'Is this how comic publishing works?!' I've found out since then," he adds wryly, "that this is not how comic book publishing works." >

**Above:** As sci-fi has grown in popularity in the culture, it has also established itself as a mainstay of non-superhero comics, with titles as diverse as sci-fi Western *East of West* and sprawling space epic *Saga*.


I'm not sure where I am right now.
And I'm not sure what's happening.
And I think I just peed myself.

**Above:** What do you do after you've written major series at Marvel like *Punisher War Journal* and *Invincible Iron Man*? For writer Matt Fraction, the answer was to create a series Marvel wouldn't have touched about a couple who stop time when they have sex

> “There is an audience of diverse human beings out there. They've always been there, and they've been craving an alternative”

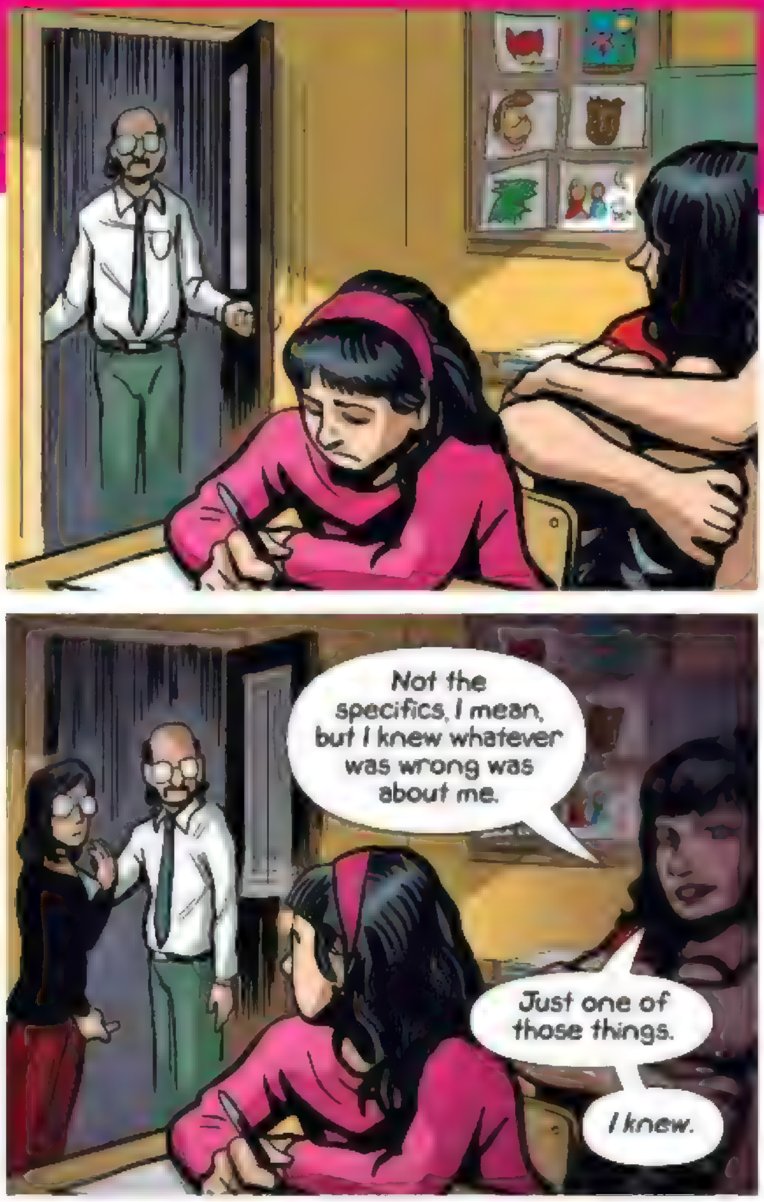
The Image Comics of the '90s, though, is not the Image Comics of today. Like Factory Records (where boss Tony Wilson once spent £30,000 on a table), Image was a ramshackle operation built on little business experience; comics used to arrive late to retailers and the whole enterprise eventually descended into squabbles and splits in the mid-'90s. Creatively, too, it was still enslaved to superheroes and bombast, playing comics like *Witchblade*, *Youngblood* and *Spawn* on maximum volume.

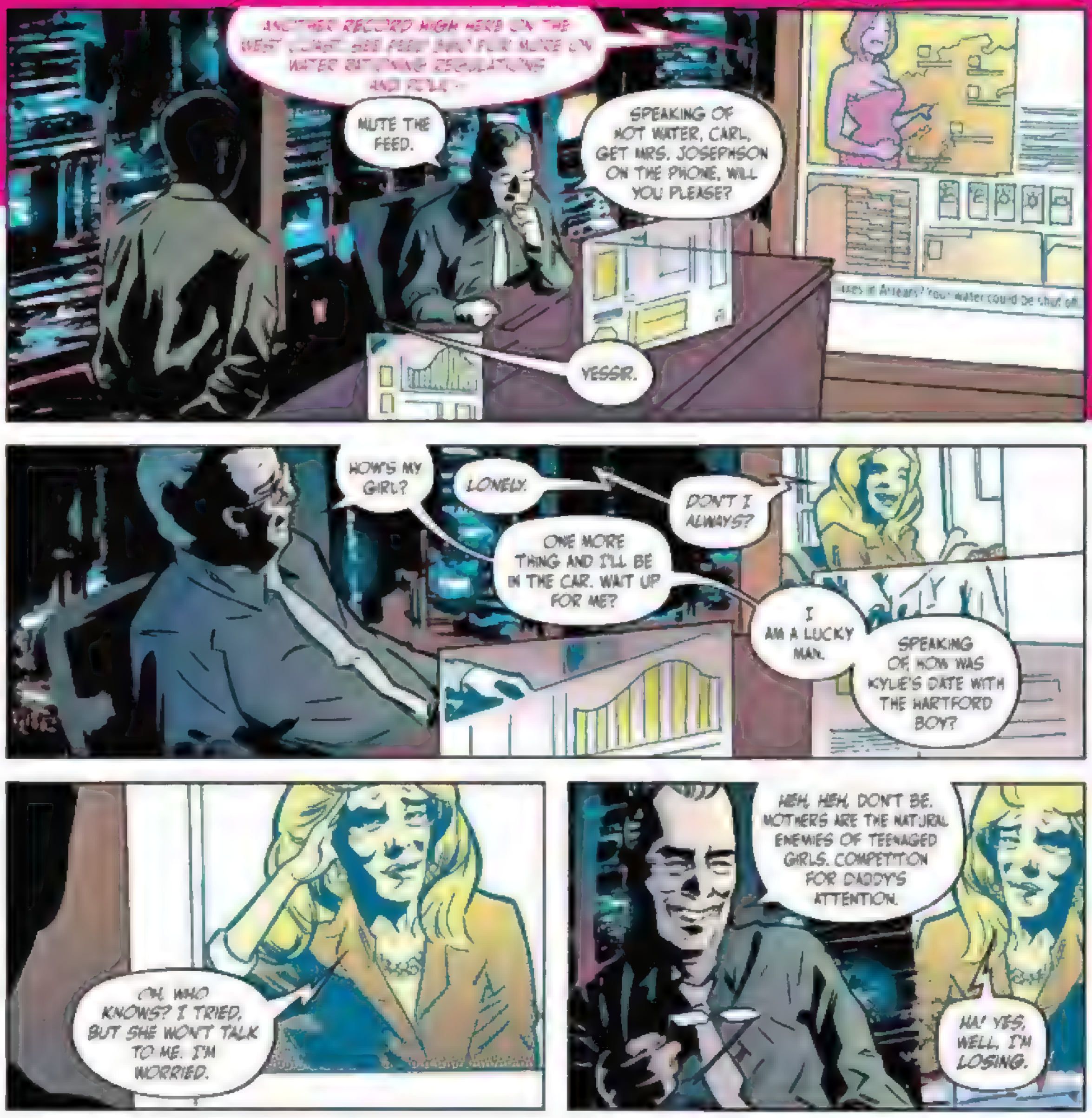
By contrast, the last decade or so has seen a shift away from the familiar and into tales that are bold, broad and unlike anything else out there. Who else, for instance, would publish Fraction and Zdarsky's *Sex Criminals*, about a couple who stop time whenever they orgasm? Or John Layman's *Chew*, about a detective who gets psychic impressions from anything he eats? Music industry comic *Phonogram*, says Gillen, "could not have gone anywhere else. I don't think Vertigo would've done it for legal reasons – it's so clearly based on real stuff. Image is weird in so many ways."

Image's diverse line-up includes Jonathan Hickman's *East of West* (a sci-fi Western) and *The Manhattan Projects* (with gun-toting Einstein!), Robert Kirkman and Paul Azaceta's horror book *Outcasts*, Jason Aaron and Jason Latour's deep south crime comic *Southern Bastards*, Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine De Landro's feminist send-up of exploitation films, *Bitch Planet*, and *Saga*, Brian K Vaughan and Fiona Staples' fantastically sprawling, space opera romance.

So what changed? Well, first, late-'90s publisher Jim Valentino sought to diversify Image's range by publishing creators in different genres and styles, an approach carried on by his 2004 successor Erik Larsen and current publisher Eric Stephenson. Then *The Walking Dead*, Robert Kirkman's 2004 zombie comic, went on to become a cultural phenomenon. For Image, it changed the game both creatively and financially.

"*Walking Dead* changed everything," says Gillen. "It gave Image more money, so they now had a lot of room for infrastructure. For example, Image never used to


Not the specifics, I mean, but I knew whatever was wrong was about me.
Just one of those things.
*I knew.*


ANOTHER RECORD HIGH HERE ON THE WEST COAST.
MUTE THE FEED.
SPEAKING OF HOT WATER, CARL, GET MRS. JOSEPHSON ON THE PHONE, WILL YOU PLEASE?
Your water could be shut off
YESSIR.
HOW'S MY GIRL?
LONELY.
DON'T I ALWAYS?
ONE MORE THING AND I'LL BE IN THE CAR. WAIT UP FOR ME?
I AM A LUCKY MAN.
SPEAKING OF, HOW WAS KYLIE'S DATE WITH THE HARTFORD BOY?
OH, WHO KNOWS? I TRIED, BUT SHE WON'T TALK TO ME. I'M WORRIED.
HEH, HEH, DON'T BE. MOTHERS ARE THE NATURAL ENEMIES OF TEENAGED GIRLS. COMPETITION FOR DADDY'S ATTENTION.
HA! YES, WELL, I'M LOSING.

**Above:** Though there have been exceptions (like *Star Wars*), both Marvel and DC have found great success in building whole universes within which all their titles must fit. Even in its earliest days, there was never a single "Image Universe" and there's always room for unique titles like *Bitch Planet*

traditionally do advances – it was an all-in risk. But now for several projects they know are known quantities and are going to [make] money back, they pay in advance.

"The fact that Image have more cash flow and can pay more advances, it helps certain creators who couldn't have worked for no money for six months to do stuff. When we first started it was me making sure Jamie McKelvie [Gillen's artist co-creator] didn't starve to death. What it really is, is success begetting success. So the fact that the Image books are doing well brings more attention to other Image books. This means Image have more money, which leads to more and more creators."

But, for creators, there are surely still big financial risks? Gillen, for example, was initially forced to halt volume three of *Phonogram* because of financial pressure. (It has since been released.)

"The risk is enormous," he admits. "With Image, the reality is, 'Can this book keep going?' I'm sure Image do cancel books but they don't usually have to. The creator will cancel the books because they're not making any money. Comics are such hard work, and it's not worth putting time into something unless you can actually eat while doing it. There's that Jack Kirby quote: 'Comics will break your heart.' And that's true. But they kind of make your heart worth having in the first place."

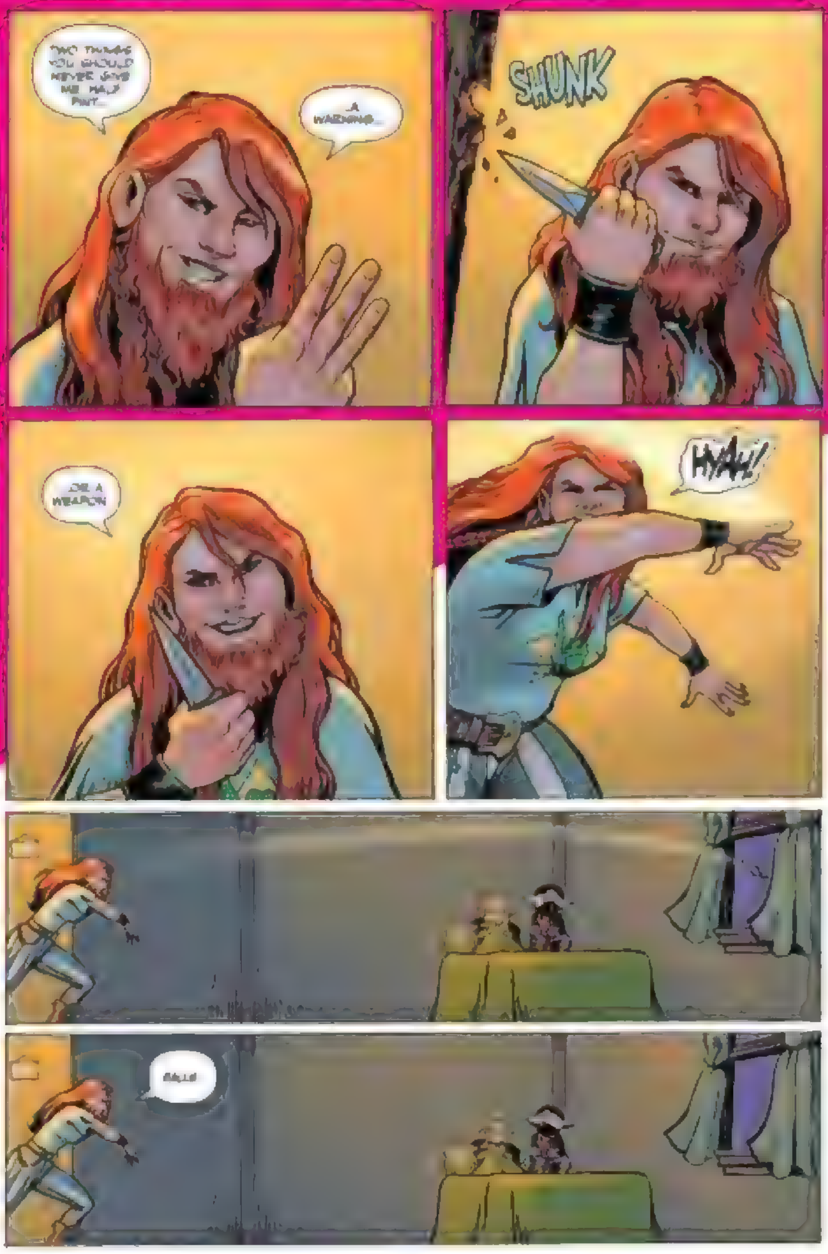
## DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

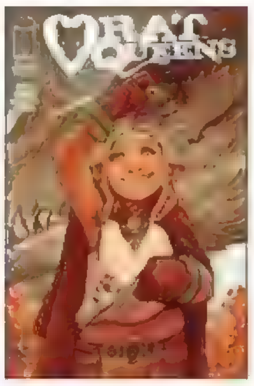
Image Comics' creative renaissance didn't happen in a vacuum, though. One contributing factor is the general shift in the perception of nerd culture, which has filtered down to a comic book industry that in North America last year was worth $900 million, compared to $700 million in 2011. And with that broader audience has come an appetite for different stories.

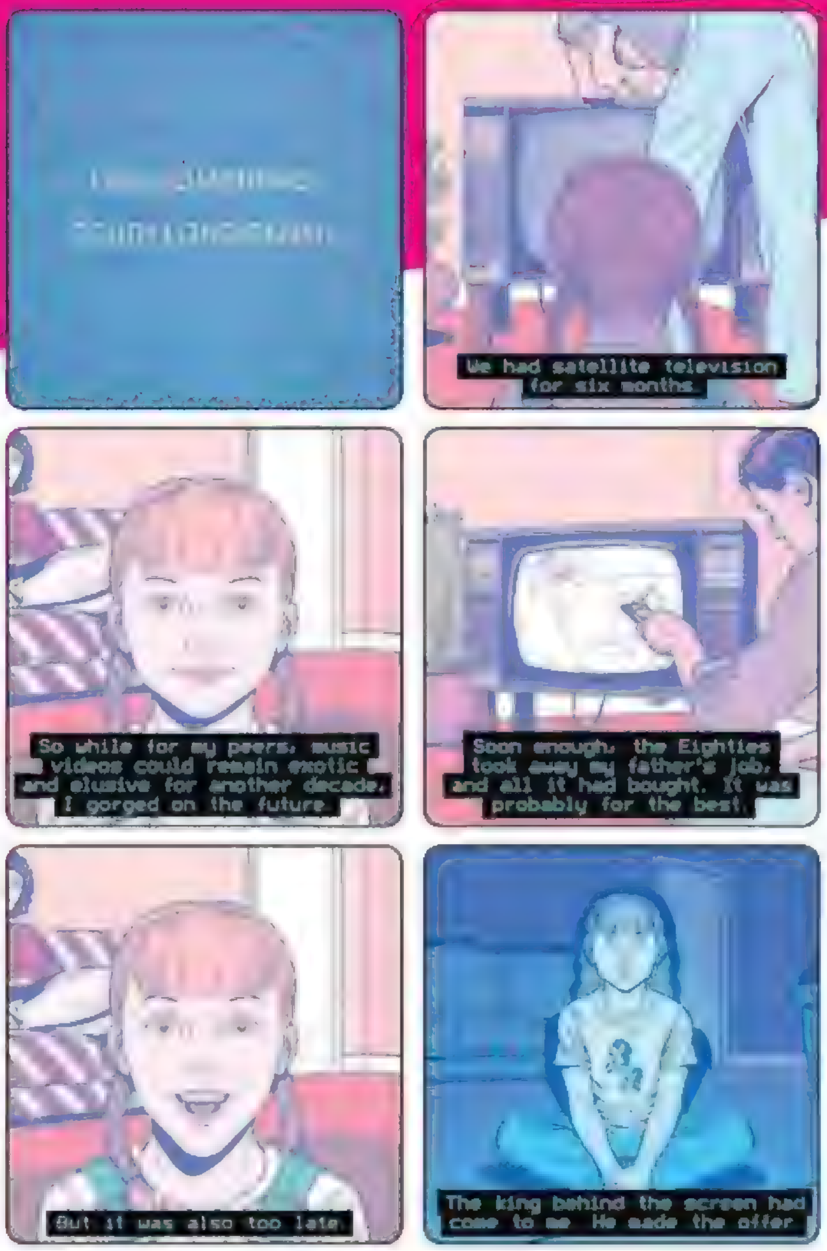
John Layman, known for *Chew*, says: "if you read [Marvel and DC] comics long enough you see that there is the illusion of change but very little changes, because the giant corporations that own the characters need to keep the cash cow going. I think people eventually get weary of that and look for something new.

"*Walking Dead* showed there was a market outside capes and superpowers, and I think it's just grown exponentially in terms of what types of stories are being told – in tone and genre and subject matter. As more and more different stuff gets out there, it appeals to a larger and larger readership. People who never be interested in superheroes are [finding] stuff out there that does appeal to them."

"There is an entire audience of diverse human beings out there," >


TWO THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER GIVE ME HALF PINT...
...A WARNING...
SHUNK
...OR A WEAPON
HYAA!




We had satellite television for six months.
So while for my peers, music videos could remain exotic and elusive for another decade, I gorged on the future.
Soon enough, the Eighties took away my father's job, and all it had bought. It was probably for the best.
But it was also too late.
The king behind the screen had come to me. He made the offer.

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adds Tess Fowler, "waiting for their chance to become invested in a new comic. They've always been there. Social media has just amplified their voices. And they've been craving an alternative for ever. Comics is playing catch-up."

Most of those new readers are women between the ages of 17 and 33, the fastest growing demographic in comics. Yet while Image may be publishing a diverse range of stories, its creators are often less diverse. Speaking at the Image Expo last year, publisher Ben Stephenson admitted as much but declared: "We want to build a more diverse industry. We want to develop a more diverse talent pool."

Kelly Sue DeConnick offered a perspective in an interview with the London School of Economics and Political Science: "We get this idea that comics are this slum where it is much worse than anywhere else. I don't think this is actually the case. I mean, look at the major films that were released in the United States last year. Women had 30 percent of the speaking roles and were 15 percent of the protagonists. This is down from 16 percent ten years ago. So this is not a comics problem, this is a cultural problem."

## GROWING DIVERSITY

But it does pose the question: if you have a business model where essentially anyone can have their voice heard, why aren't they there?

"By and large, women, persons of colour and LGBTQIA folk have not been made welcome within the industry," says Fowler. "Granted, there are folks dotting the industry landscape who want change. And there are folks here and there breaking down the barriers where they can, but it's not a majority ideal. Image cannot pull from a talent pool that doesn't exist. Those people are still mostly locked outside.

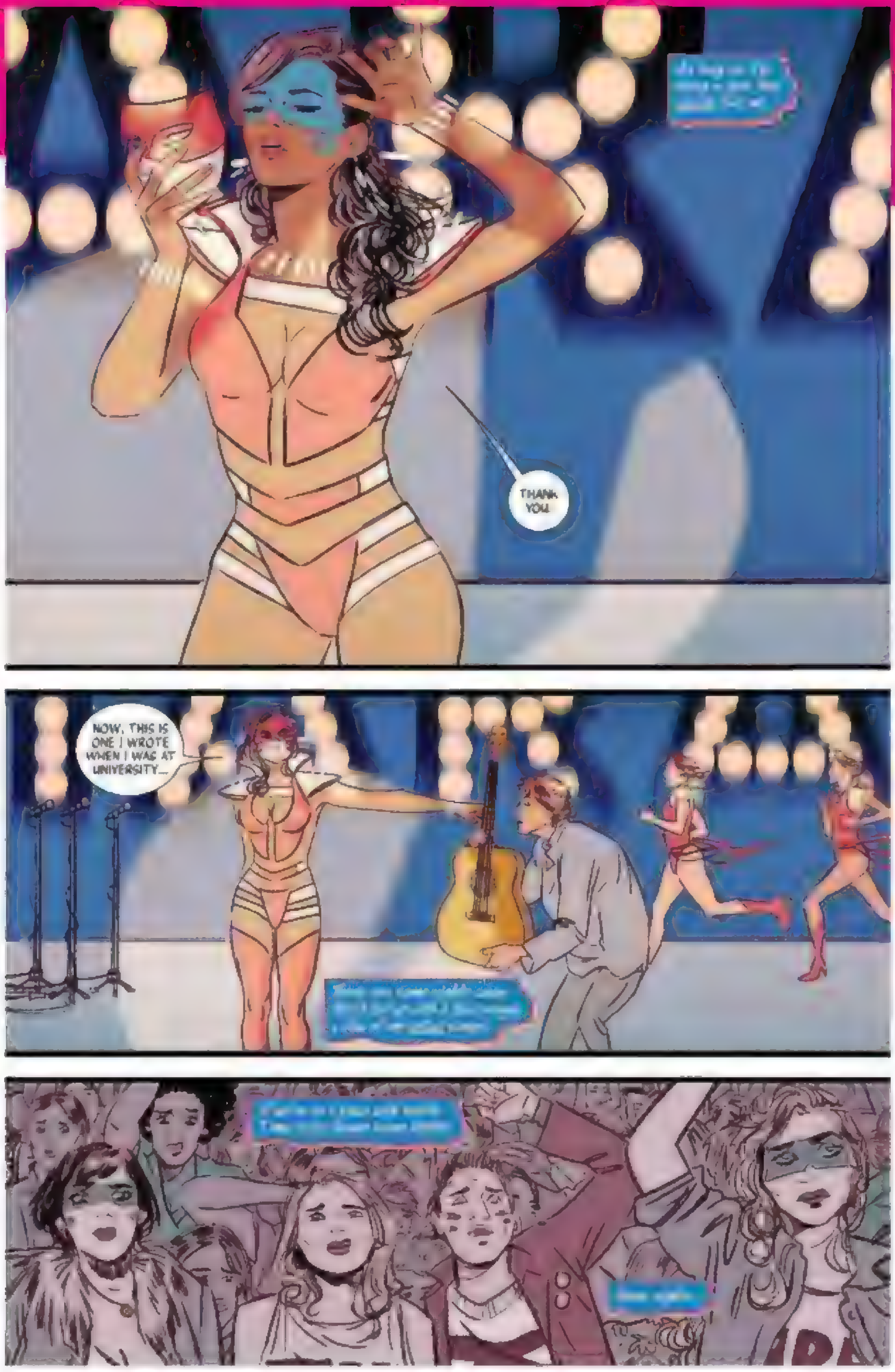
THE WICKED + THE DIVINE

**Above:** Image offers a home to the fantasy of *Rat Queens*, the hip, music-themed *Phonogram*, and the fantasy saga of gods becoming shortlived human stars in *The Wicked + The Divine*

"I think more folks need to be brave and come calling at the gates, bringing with them their webcomics, their digital comics, their self-published comics and their online followings. If enough people come crashing through the doors, the game is automatically altered. Rules have to change."

"Image is better than it was a few years ago," says Gillen. "And if you look at the Image Expo, the people on stage are much better.

"What I'll say is that while I'm depressed about representation, the first ever Image Expo we went to we were secret guests, and our queue was as diverse an audience as you could wish for. Those people have come to Image Expo, which is more of a trade show than a


THANK YOU
NOW, THIS IS ONE I WROTE WHEN I WAS AT UNIVERSITY...

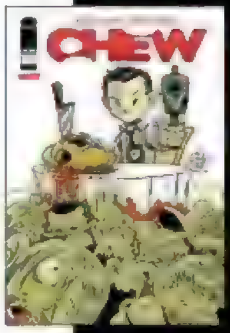
Comic Con. They're invested in comics as an art form – they could be the people pitching books in two or three years. I'm not saying time will solve all the problems, but we're on a better route and I'm optimistic for the future. The problem with the future is it cannot come fast enough."

Either way, there's no denying that Image Comics has come a long way since the days of spandex and *Spawn*. It's unarguably home to some of the boldest, weirdest and most adventurous books on the comic stands right now. It's a publisher that takes chances that often pay off. It's also, once again, the third largest publisher behind Marvel and DC.

More than that, as publisher Ben Stephenson has said: "Image is still exactly what it's always been: the number one publisher of creator-owned comics. We're not in the movie business – we don't promise people a walk down the red carpet while we take 50 percent of their media rights. We make comics. We are the alternative."

## 5 MUST-READS

1 **SAGA:** Probably Image's most acclaimed book right now – and with good reason. Brian K Vaughan and Fiona Staples' science fantasy epic lives up to its name. A sprawling tale about a family fleeing a galactic war, it's moving, exciting and weird. Highly recommended.



2 **CHEW:** Tony Chu is an FDA agent with a very unique ability: eating food gives him psychic visions of crimes. This bizarre detective story by John Layman and Rob Guillory has won two Eisner and two Harvey awards and is as bizarre as it is hilariously funny.

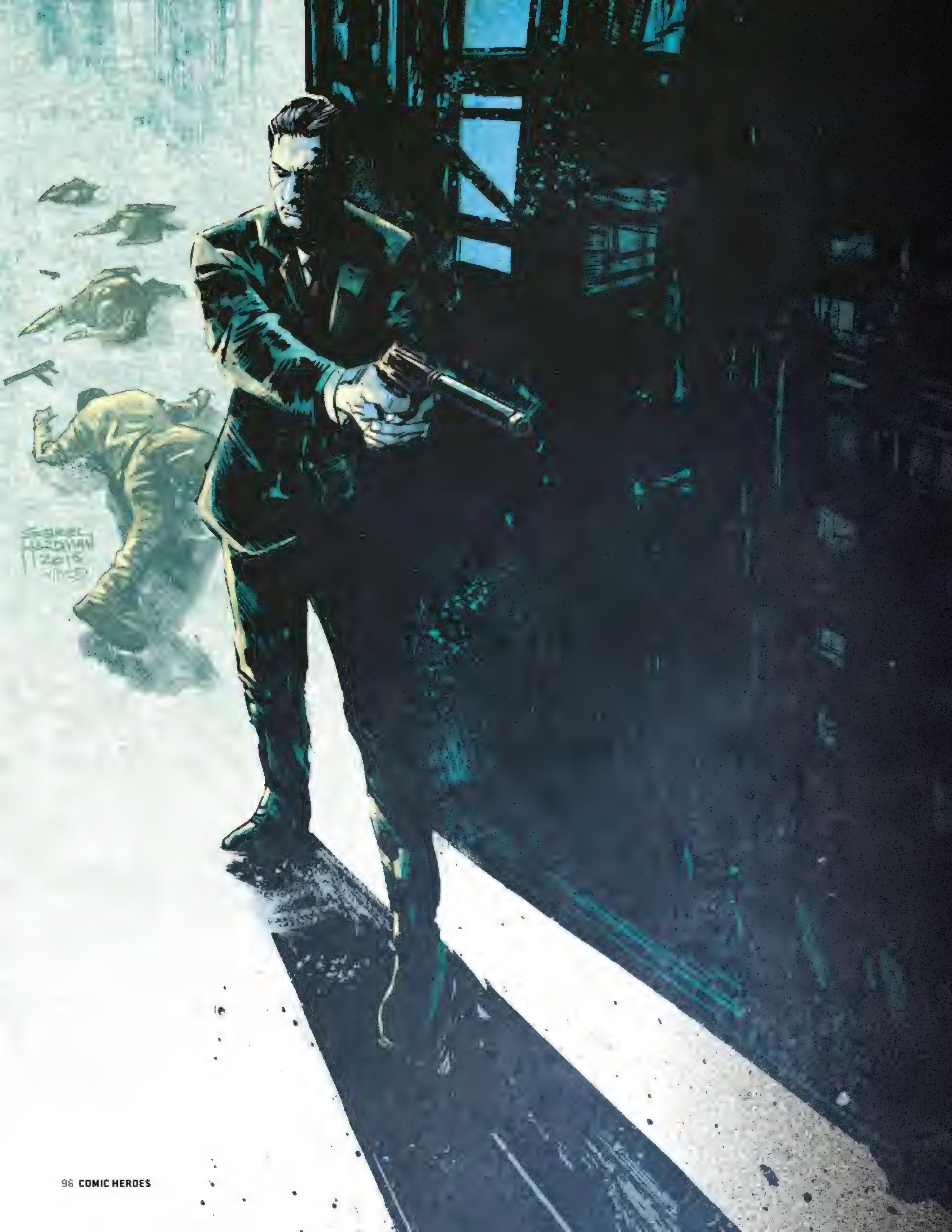
3 **RAT QUEENS:** This ode to *Dungeons & Dragons* by Kurtis J Wiebe and a cast of artists (currently Tess Fowler) may look like traditional fantasy fare, but it's anything but. The Rat Queens of the title are a gang of adventurers who'd much rather be having fun than fighting.

SEX CRIMINALS

4 **SEX CRIMINALS:** Matt Fraction and Chip Zdarsky's gloriously filthy and gloriously humane exploration of love, lust, mental health and boners is one of the best books around. It's certainly got the most devoted fans, who flood its letters page with tales of their own love lives.

SOUTHERN BASTARDS

5 **SOUTHERN BASTARDS:** Think you know it all about the American South? Think again. This crime epic by Jasons Aaron and Latour (both Southerners themselves) embraces and deconstructs the clichés of the region, telling a powerful tale of violence and small town cruelty.



GABRIEL HARDMAN 2015

# THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD

**WARREN ELLIS** AND **JAMES MASTERS** ARE BRINGING JAMES BOND BACK TO COMICS AFTER 20 YEARS. **STEPHEN JEWELL** CONDUCTS THE INTERROGATION

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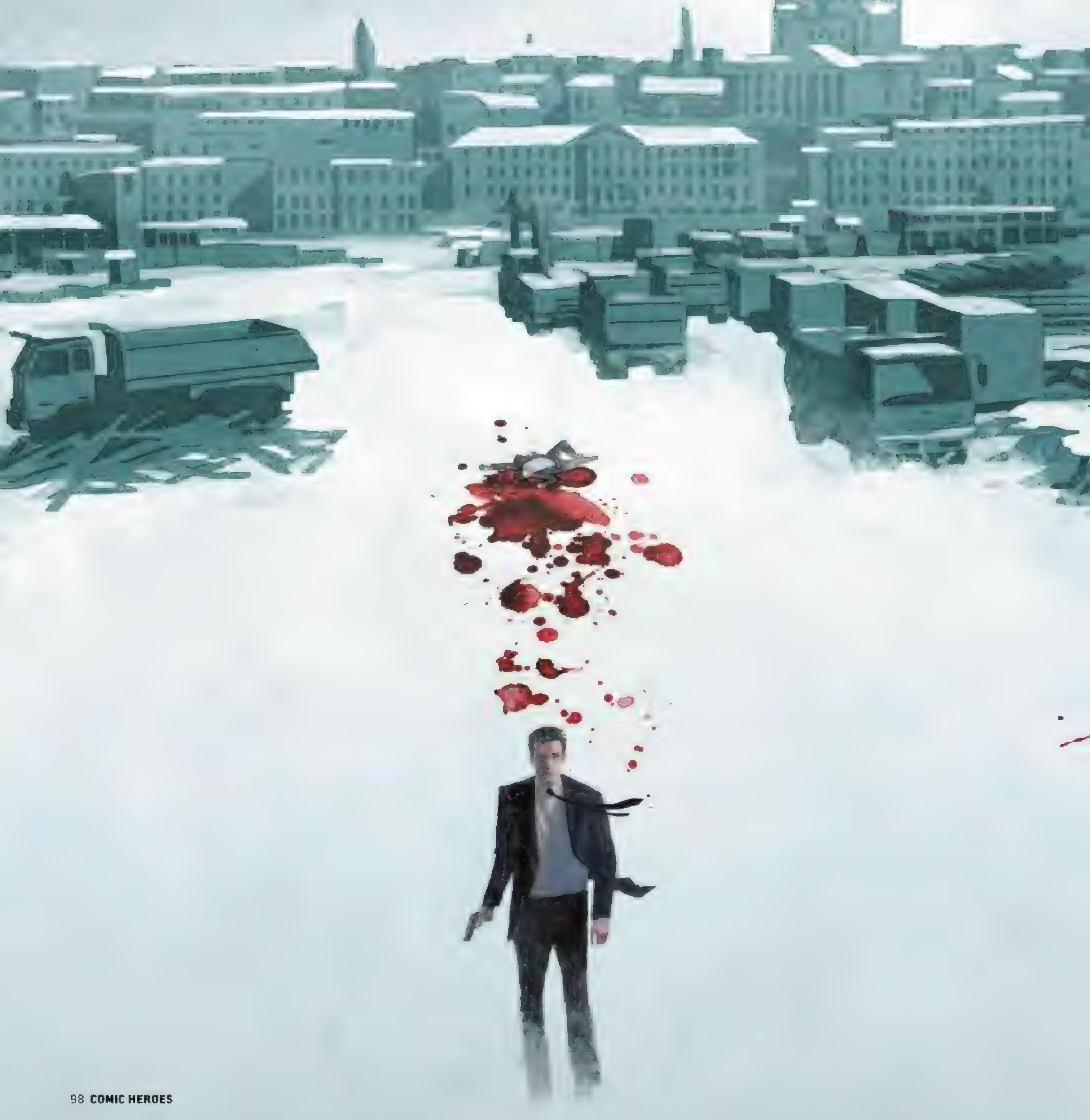
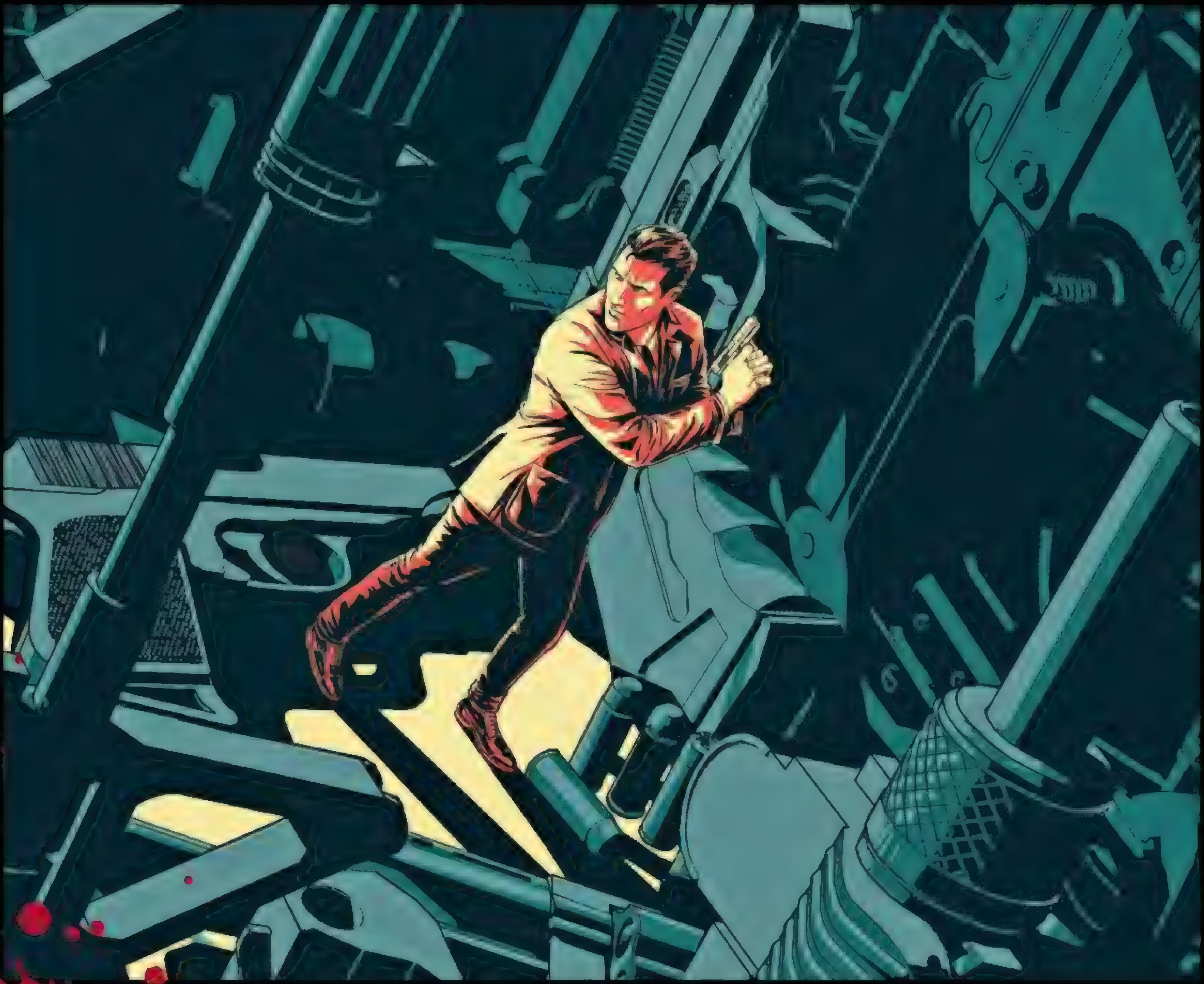
> “The literary Bond is a brutal square peg who will make himself fit wherever he’s needed to get the job done”





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Although he's the star of the longest running movie franchise, James Bond last graced a comic book page almost two decades ago. But after Dynamite Entertainment obtained the comics rights from Ian Fleming Publications, 007 is set to appear in a new series of stories and adaptations, starting with *VARGR* in November. Written by Warren Ellis and drawn by Jason Masters, the six-parter promises to revive the "brutal, damaged" original.

"Bond is, of course, a British icon, which made the job very hard to resist – especially in this form, where I'm writing the Fleming Bond of the novels, not the more compromised version of the films," says Ellis. "I grew up with the films, obviously. I know I read one or two of the books in my teens, but I'd read them all by my 30s."

Artist Jason Masters cites a Bond opus, 1983's *Octopussy*, as one of his formative movie-going memories. "That was it, I was hooked!" he recalls. "I made it my mission to track down all the older James Bond films after that. I loved them, even *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, which felt like it delved into a more personal side of Bond. That was refreshing."

## BRUTAL BASICS

But unlike Ellis, Masters has never read any of Ian Fleming's novels or short story collections, which were first published between 1953 and 1966. "Warren's research and scripts have been quite eye-opening for me," he says. "It's impossible to not love the suave, slick Bond of the movies, but the literary Bond almost feels more interesting, as he's like a brutal square peg that will make himself fit wherever he's needed to get the job done." ➤

**Opposite and above:** No fewer than nine variant covers are planned for the first issue of the new series from Dynamite (including a blank one for even more artists to create unique sketch covers on). Page 96 shows the Gabriel Hardman version; opposite is the version by Dom Reardon; above is the retailer exclusive version by series artist Jason Masters.

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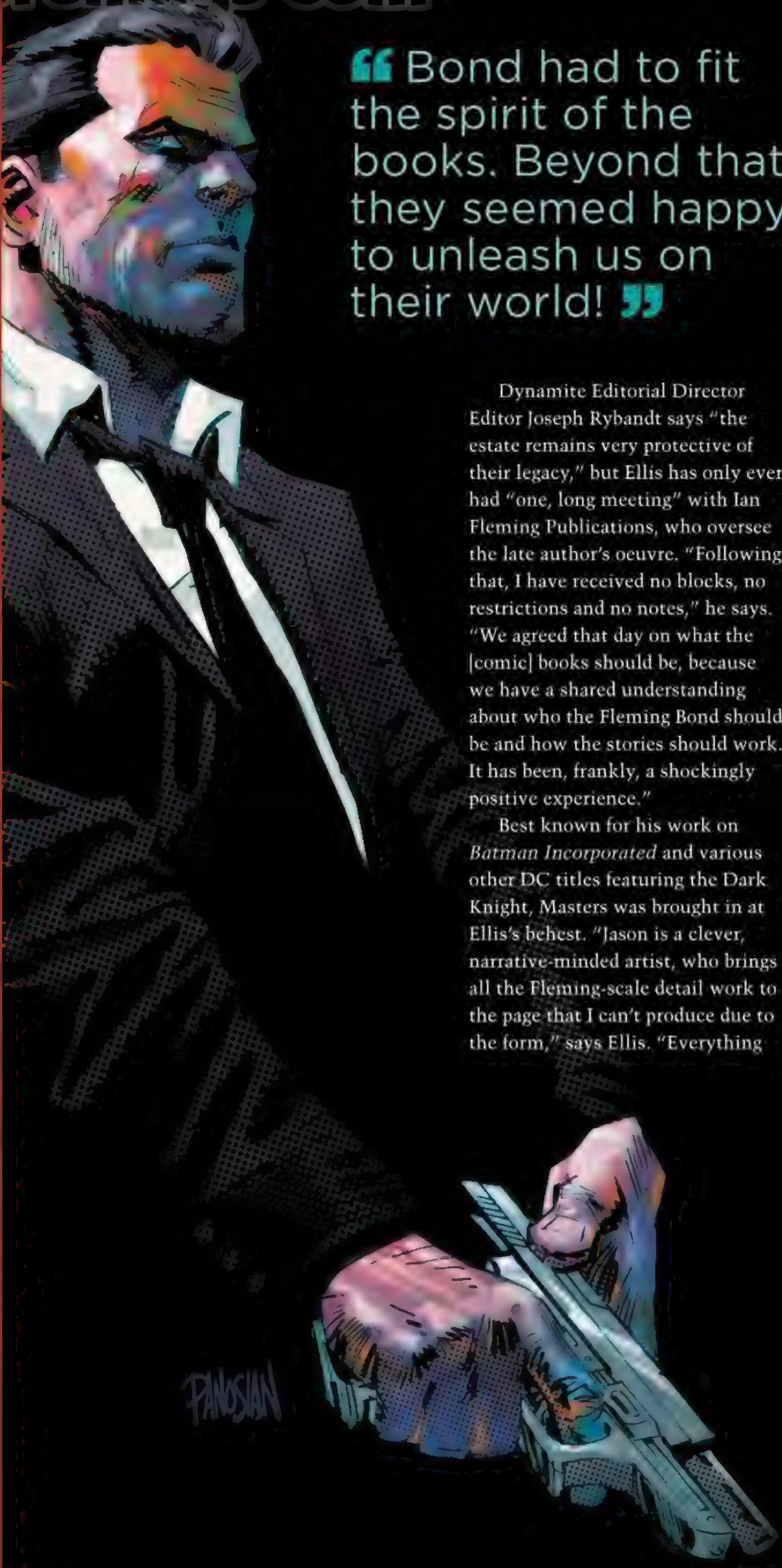

> “Bond had to fit the spirit of the books. Beyond that, they seemed happy to unleash us on their world!”

Dynamite Editorial Director Editor Joseph Rybandt says “the estate remains very protective of their legacy,” but Ellis has only ever had “one, long meeting” with Ian Fleming Publications, who oversee the late author’s oeuvre. “Following that, I have received no blocks, no restrictions and no notes,” he says. “We agreed that day on what the [comic] books should be, because we have a shared understanding about who the Fleming Bond should be and how the stories should work. It has been, frankly, a shockingly positive experience.”

Best known for his work on *Batman Incorporated* and various other DC titles featuring the Dark Knight, Masters was brought in at Ellis’s behest. “Jason is a clever, narrative-minded artist, who brings all the Fleming-scale detail work to the page that I can’t produce due to the form,” says Ellis. “Everything he draws is authentic and lived-in, in just the way Fleming would bring texture to the novels. Jason brings the Fleming!”

Masters adds: “When Warren asked me if I liked James Bond, I thought it might be because he had a project in mind that was in that vein. So finding out that he wanted me to draw the actual James Bond 007, and from his scripts, still seems completely unreal!”

## VISUAL CHALLENGES

Admitting that he’s “a huge fan” of Ellis, Masters has been impressed with the “beautiful detail” that goes into Ellis’s meticulously constructed stories. “He has the ability to uncover hidden depths in characters and situations that the rest of us probably wouldn’t even have thought to look for,” Masters says. “Warren writes with an artist in mind as he instinctively knows how the visuals will work on the page. Having said that, I’ve been allowed to throw a few of my own ideas onto the page and that’s been pretty thrilling. And I also love getting to draw Bond in the exact right shoes he’d likely wear if he was travelling.”

While Ellis had to be careful to refer only to what Fleming established as canon, Masters faced the far more daunting challenge of ensuring that his depiction of Bond doesn’t too closely resemble any of the seven actors who have played the character since *Dr. No* in 1962. “I was given strict instructions to stay away from all things related to the movies,” he says. “Early on in the design process, I came up with a look for Bond that I was quite pleased with, only to have it pointed out to me that I’d basically drawn Timothy Dalton!”

Instead, Masters modelled his Bond on American singer Hoagy Carmichael, who was Fleming’s original inspiration for 007, right down to the distinctive scar on his

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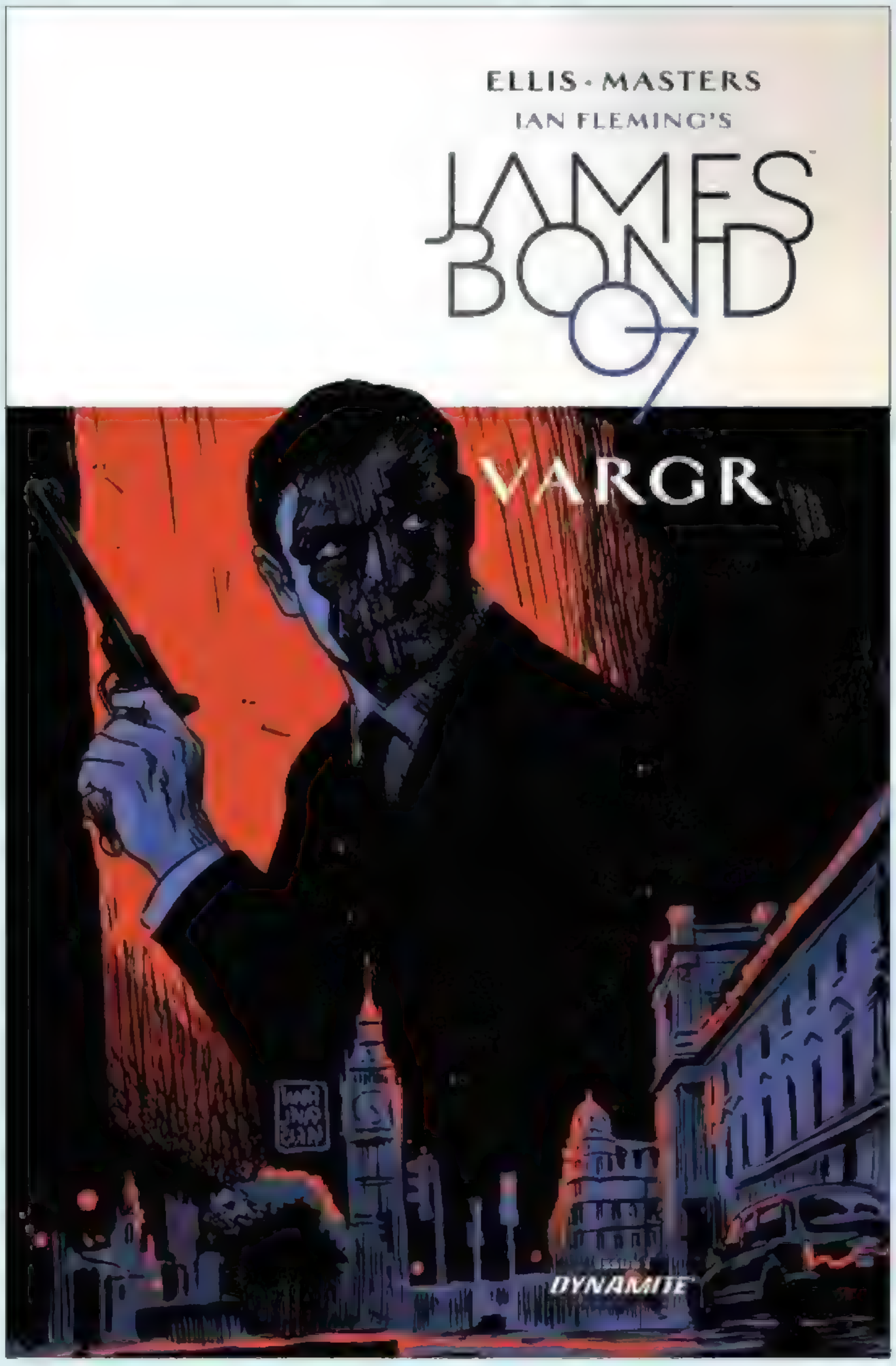
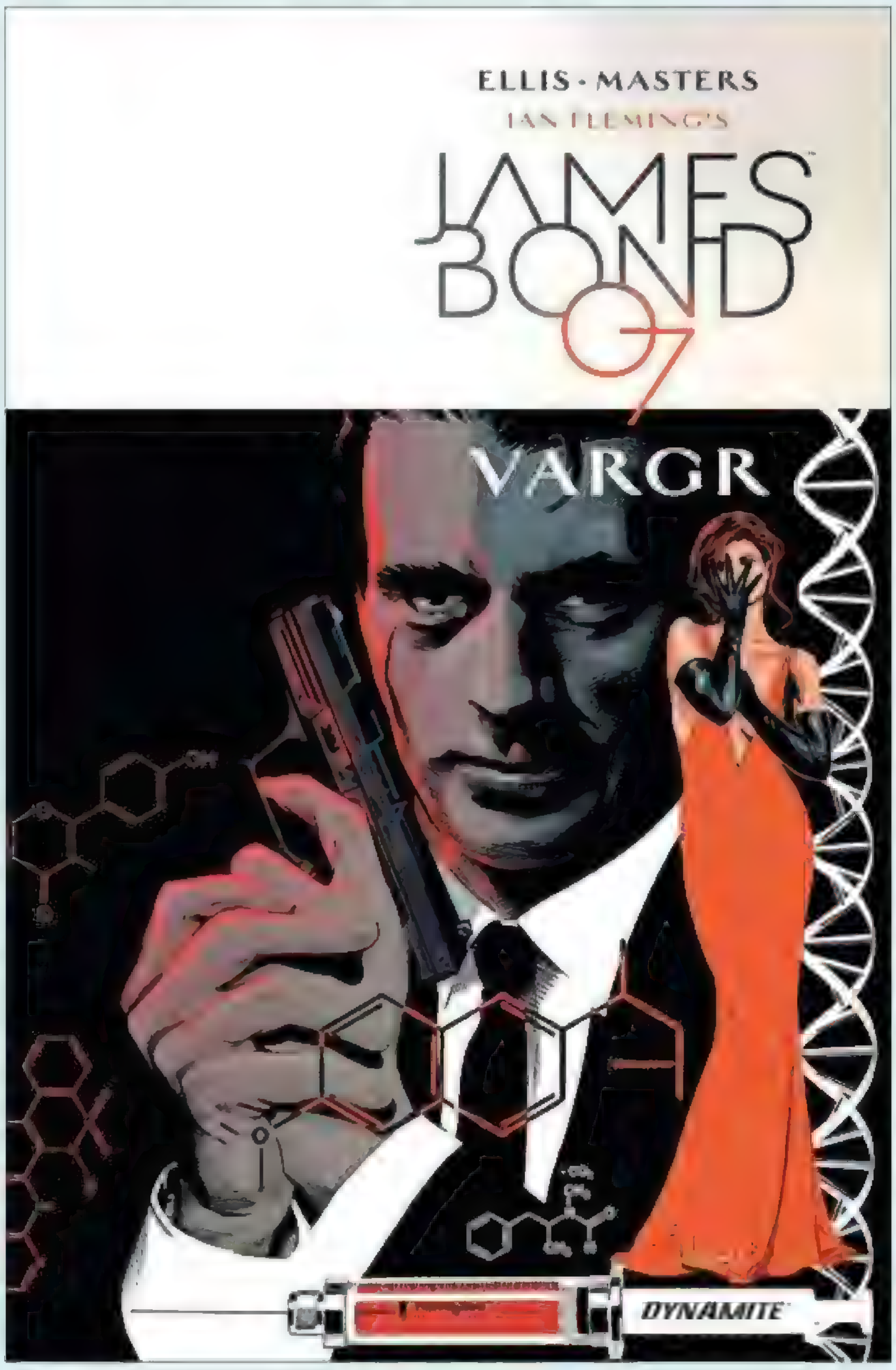




cheek. "I used that as my jumping-off point and then 30 or so revisions later I had a design that seemed to please Warren, Dynamite and the Fleming Estate," says Masters. "It was important to them that this version of Bond sticks as closely as possible to the spirit of the books. Beyond that, they seemed very happy to unleash Warren and me on their world! And M, Q and Miss Moneypenny all have original looks, based on descriptions and ideas from Warren."

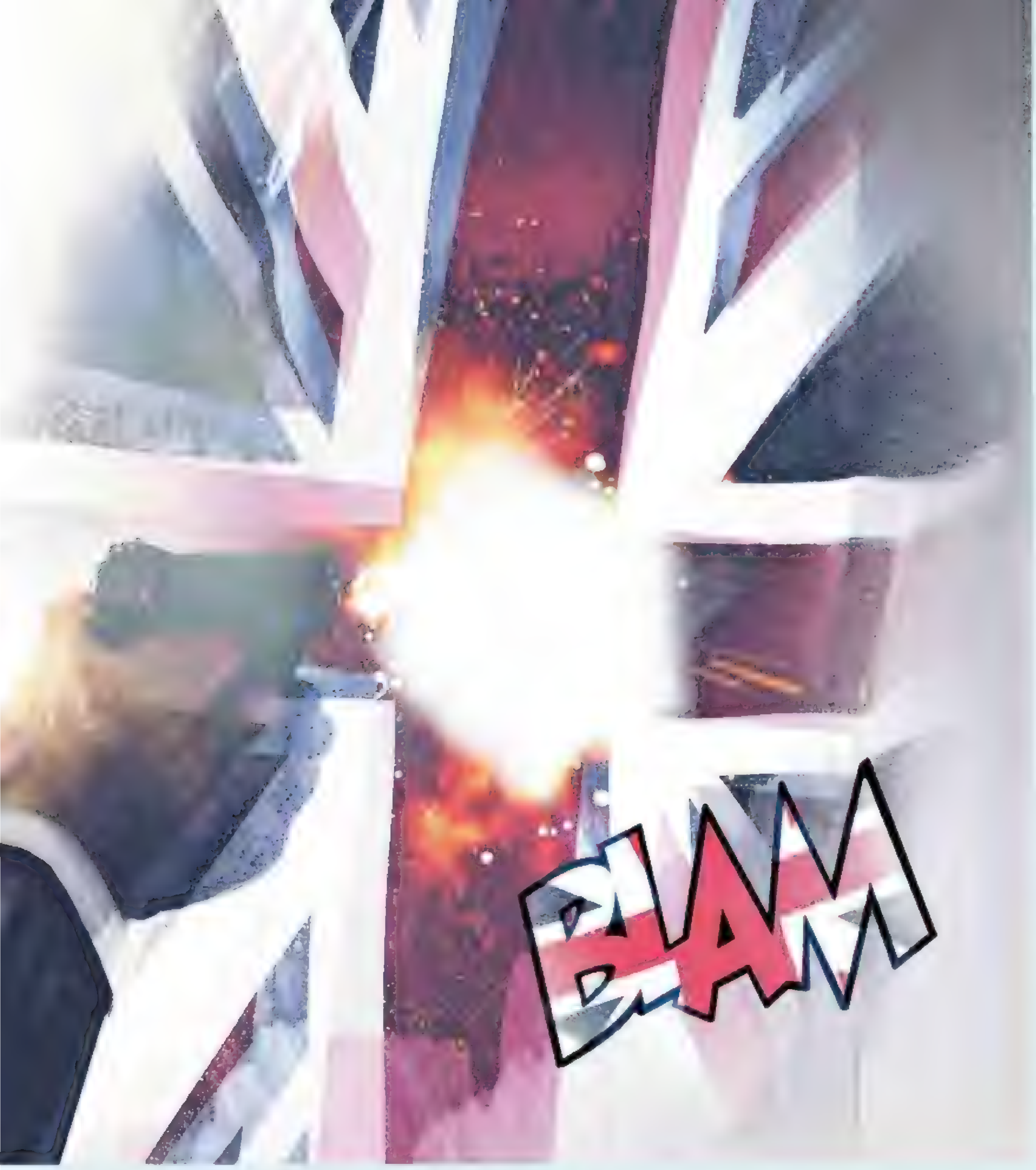
Compared to a movie, a comic book has the obvious advantage of a complete absence of "budget constraints," Rybandt notes. In a film, the costs of special effects or shooting in exotic locations could be prohibitive, but "we can create the fantastic much easier and we can let the eye stay on it for as long as we need it to, as opposed to it all flashing by in a blur," says Rybandt. "There's more room to pace things evenly in comics, and to let the story breathe."

## MAKING COMICS WORK

Masters insists, however, that he and Ellis are not completely without restrictions. "The comics budget is time – while you can potentially draw anything, you still need to do it within the constraints of hitting deadlines," he argues. "From a storytelling perspective, though, my favourite thing about comic books is figuring out new ways of serving up the information for the audience, and working out how to make the page interesting and innovative without losing your story. So while I've been experimenting, I haven't pushed it terribly far yet. I'm hoping to build some rapport with the readers as the story progresses, so that when things do get unusual, the audience will already speak my language, so they will just go with it."

But while Anthony Horowitz was able to closely mimic Ian Fleming's individual writing style in *Trigger Mortis*, down to the point of making himself appear "invisible" as the author, Ellis hasn't had that luxury. "You lose the effect of [Fleming's] moments >

**Opposite and above, left to right:** Dan Panosian, Francesco Francavilla and Stephen Mooney contribute their own moody variations on the theme



of telegraphic prose in comics," he says. "It's one of the things that we can't quite emulate because the presence of storytelling images mitigates against it. But we do gain the presence, detail and atmosphere of places and things, and of course the elements of brutality or horror become more visceral. Also, when you've got an artist like Jason Masters, you can do so much with a look or an expression."

As Rybandt notes, Dynamite's agreement "relates to the literary end, the books themselves, so the new series takes the concept of Bond and places him in a modern context, like the films, only born directly and only of the books that Fleming wrote." What this means is that *VARGR*'s contemporary milieu allows Ellis to address some of Bond's more controversial, outmoded traits, particularly his notoriously predatory and misogynistic attitude towards women. "The book is set in the present day; this isn't a period piece," says Ellis. "Fleming's Bond was a product of his time. This is also Fleming's Bond, and therefore should be a product of this specific time."

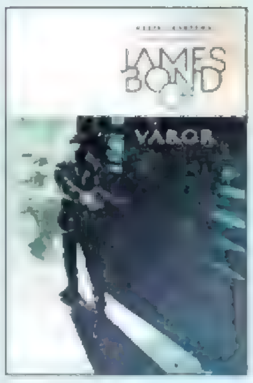
While *Trigger Mortis* opens a mere fortnight after the conclusion of Fleming's 1959 seventh Bond novel *Goldfinger*, *VARGR* takes place at a less precise moment in Bond's career. When? "People keep asking me that question!" laughs Ellis. "I'm not thinking about that too closely. Or, at least, I'm not copping to it. It's somewhere in the last third of the Fleming run, and that's all I'll say."

## PIECING IT TOGETHER

The word *vargr* is an old Norse word meaning either wolf, evildoer or destroyer, and the story starts out with Bond on "a mission of vengeance" in Helsinki before returning to London, where he is charged with picking up the pieces from a fellow 00-section agent who has fallen in the field. "The first issue begins with that mission, and leads to 007 having to assume 006's caseload, which sees him tasked to Berlin to shut down a small, agile drugs-production operation," explains Ellis. "To do this, he consults with a CIA informant, a medical-technology genius called Slaven Kurjak. And an hour later, it all goes horribly wrong for Bond..."

"*VARGR* is very much an Ellis comic, so all the future tech ideas, strong leads and exotic locales are all in place," adds Rybandt. "The plot is very Warren as well, as it concerns the enhancement of humans and drug cocktails of the near future. All of which gets thrown against Bond, of course!"

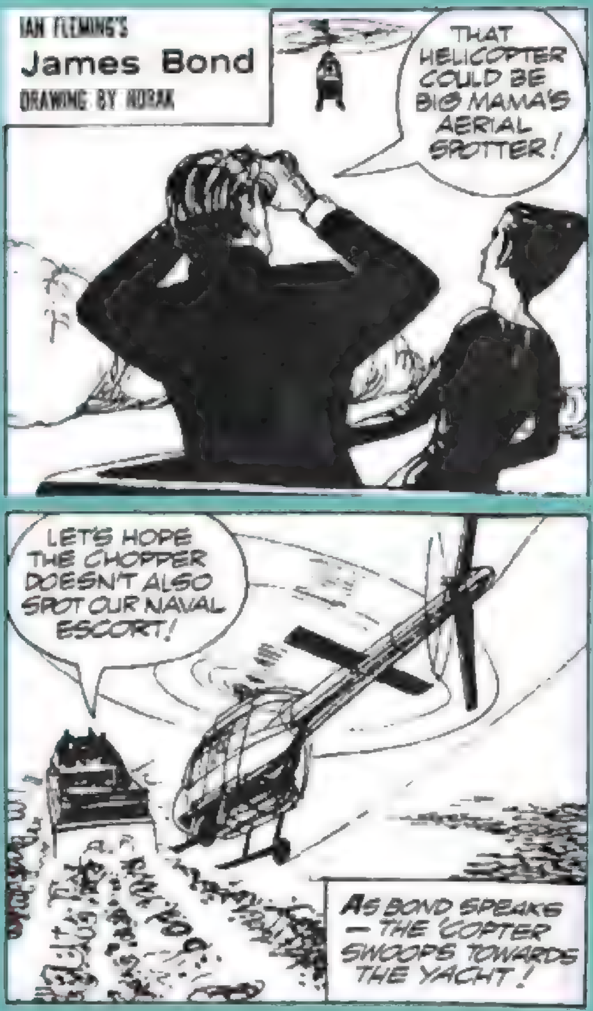
Having signed up for a 12-issue stint, Ellis has hinted that his next arc might feature Bond's CIA foil, Felix Leiter. Meanwhile, having agreed a ten-year contract with Ian Fleming Publications, Dynamite will next delve back into Bond's past with adaptations of all Ian Fleming's original novels, starting with 007's debut in 1953's *Casino Royale*. "We've decided to start to craft this graphic novel as the beginning of a series of graphic novels," says Rybandt, who also reveals plans to tell tales that supplement Fleming's: "We're also doing an original graphic novel telling Bond's origin, and that'll be happening in early 2016." CH



**Top:** Jock takes the most distinctive approach, depicting no more of Bond than his hand. All the covers feature the same stylish typographic treatment.

# LICENCE TO THRILL:

## JAMES BOND'S HISTORY IN COMICS


IAN FLEMING'S
James Bond
DRAWING BY HORAK
THAT HELICOPTER COULD BE BIG MAMA'S AERIAL SPOTTER!
LET'S HOPE THE CHOPPER DOESN'T ALSO SPOT OUR NAVAL ESCORT!
AS BOND SPEAKS — THE 'COPTER SWOOPS TOWARDS THE YACHT!

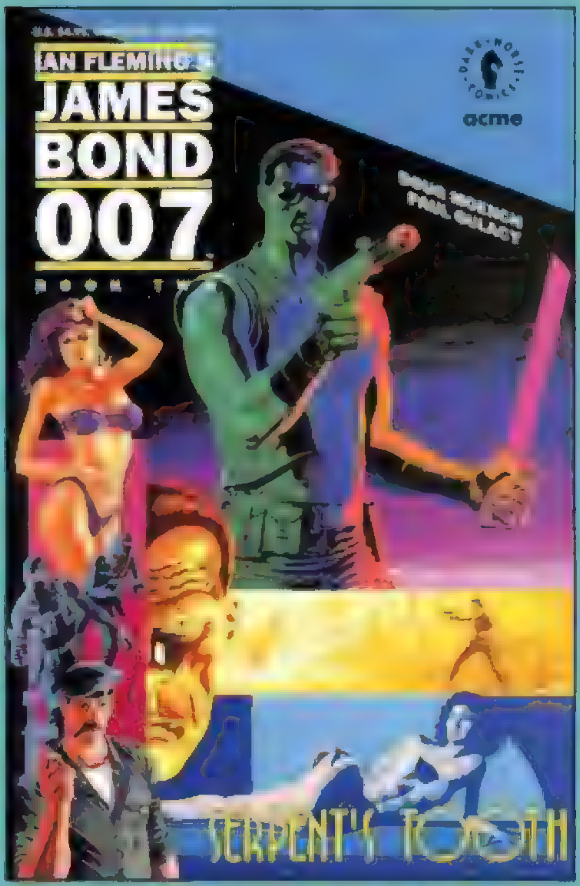
It's been nearly 20 years since the last James Bond comic – the first issue of Topps' never-completed adaptation of *Goldeneye* by Don McGregor and Rick Magyar – appeared in 1996, but 007 has featured in comics since shortly after *Casino Royale* was published in 1953. The *Daily Express* began serialising that book in a newspaper strip version by Anthony Hern and John McClusky in 1958. Adaptations of all of Fleming's novels followed over the next eight years, mostly illustrated by Henry Gammidge. *Modesty Blaise* creator Peter O'Donnell took on *Dr. No* in 1960, two years before the film.

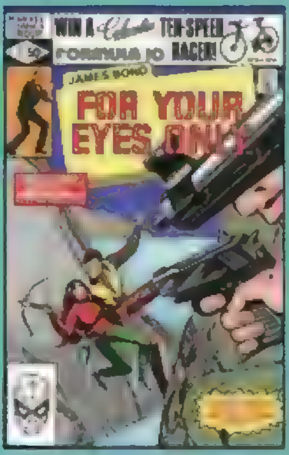
The first James Bond comic book was a *Dr. No* movie tie-in by Norman Nodell, released by Classics Illustrated and DC Comics in 1963. After that, it wasn't until 1981 that Larry Hama, Howard Chaykin and Vince Coletta tackled *For Your Eyes Only* for Marvel, who also assigned Steve Moore and Paul Neary to *Octopussy* in 1983.

The first original Bond comic was Mike Grell's *Permission to Die*, from Eclipse Comics 1989-91. After securing the rights in 1992, Dark Horse began a run of Bond books with Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy's *Serpent's Tooth*.

Along with *Light of My Death* by Das Petrou and John Watkiss, Dark Horse's then UK office commissioned Simon Jowett to write *Shattered Helix* for David Lloyd and the never-completed *Silent Armageddon* for John M Burns. First conceived by Jowett around 1990, "some time before the internet, hackers, computer viruses and AIs became common currency," *Silent Armageddon*'s sinister artificial intelligence is echoed in the cutting edge technology that Ellis plans to explore in *VARGR*.

"I pitched the villain as an artificial intelligence capable of wreaking havoc upon our increasingly networked world," says Jowett. "We now live in a world of Ebola, swine flu and H5N1, so the idea that the Powers-That-Be might dabble in the pool of designer diseases, and then try to hide their failure in the most inaccessible place on Earth, is all too easy to believe."

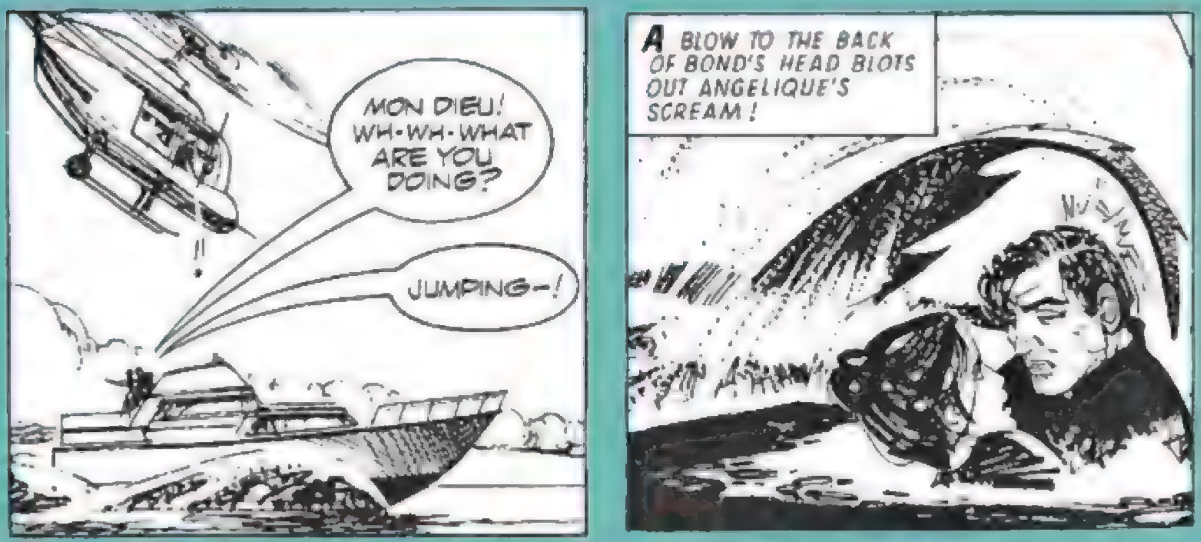

IAN FLEMING'S
JAMES BOND 007
BOOK TWO
DARK HORSE COMICS
acme
DOUG MOENCH
PAUL GULACY
SERPENT'S TOOTH

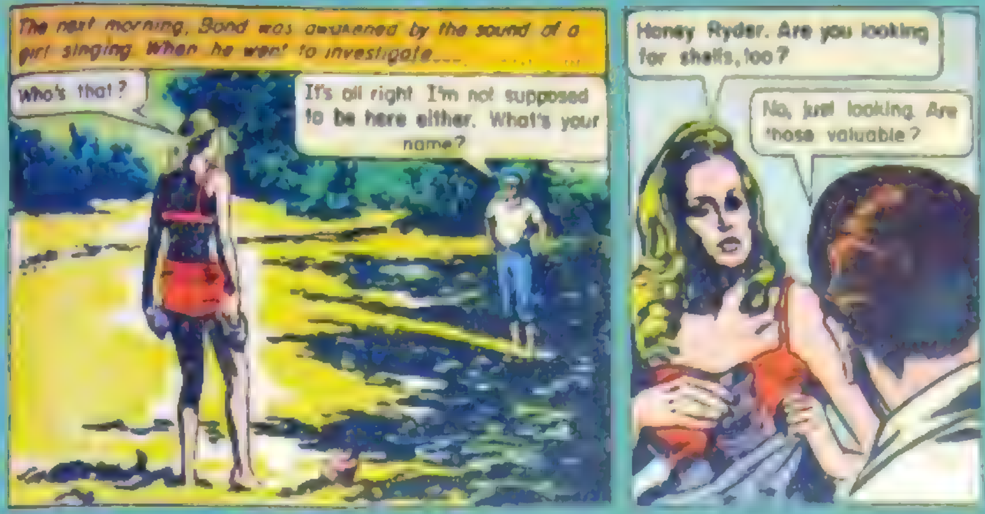

WIN A Schwinn TEN-SPEED RACER!
JAMES BOND
FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

**Above:** [illegible]

**Right:** [illegible]

© THE RESPECTIVE PUBLISHERS / LICENSORS


MON DIEU! WH-WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
JUMPING—!
A BLOW TO THE BACK OF BOND'S HEAD BLOTS OUT ANGELIQUE'S SCREAM!


The next morning, Bond was awakened by the sound of a girl singing. When he went to investigate...
Who's that?
It's all right. I'm not supposed to be here either. What's your name?
Honey Ryder. Are you looking for shells, too?
No, just looking. Are those valuable?

**Above:** [illegible]

**Left:** [illegible]

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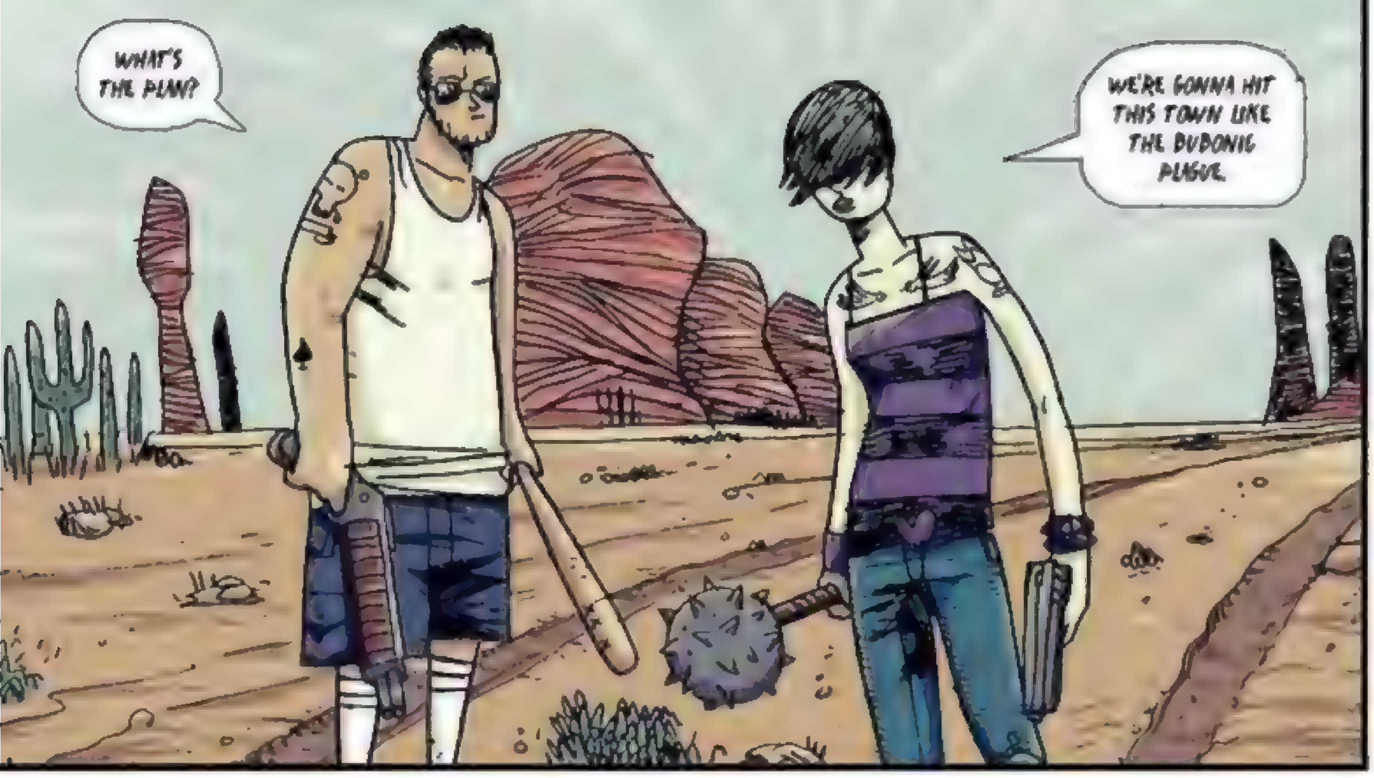
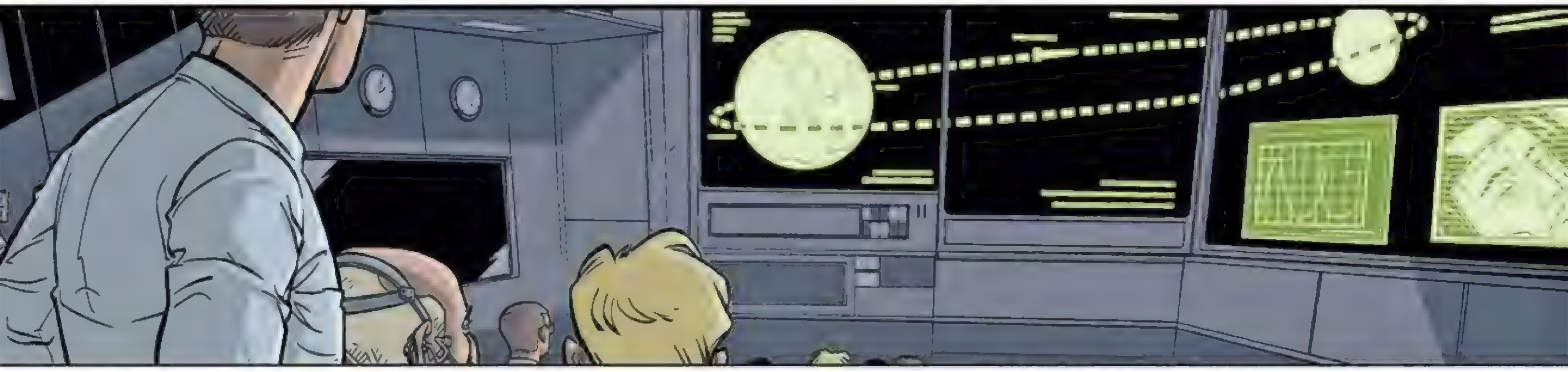

WHAT'S THE PLAN?
WE'RE GONNA HIT THIS TOWN LIKE THE BUBONIC PLAGUE.



# ACES HIGH

V FOR VENDETTA'S LEGENDARY CO-CREATOR **DAVID LLOYD** IS SETTING HIS SIGHTS ON A NEW CAUSE – REINVENTING DIGITAL COMICS, AS **DAVID BARNETT** DISCOVERS

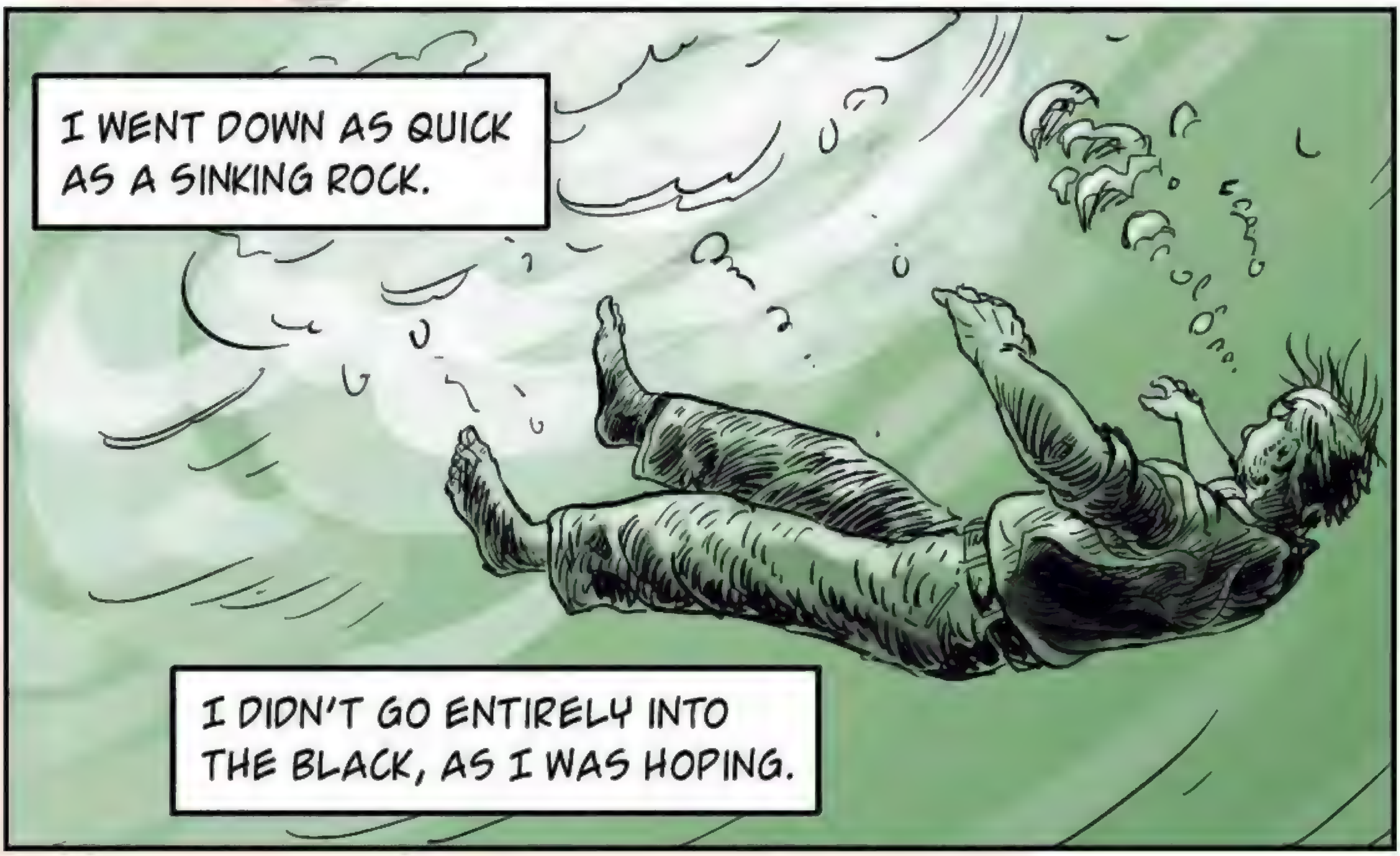
**Opposite** The diverse Aces lineup includes (from top, left to right) *Sicarios* by Roberto Corroto and Enrico Montana; *Return Of The Human* by JC Vaughan and Mark Wheatley; *Shoot For The Moon* by Alain Maurice and Alexandre Tefenkgi; *Cowboys and Insects* by Dave Hine and Shaky Kane; and *Valley Of The Shadows* by David Lloyd and Dave Jackson.

ALL IMAGES © THEIR RESPECTIVE CREATORS

Had David Lloyd given the world – and the post-millennial anti-capitalism movement – nothing other than the iconic look for Alan Moore's V for Vendetta, his place would still be assured in comics history.

As it is, he's had a career spanning almost four decades, often at the forefront of British comics, and with his current project *Aces Weekly* he also has a place in the vanguard of the digital comics revolution.

*Aces Weekly* is a digital-only comics anthology that launched three years ago by Lloyd and Bambos Georgiou, a true comics renaissance man who has worked over the past quarter-century as a publisher, editor, writer, artist and journalist on publications and properties ranging from *2000 AD* to Thundercats to Sid the Snake. >


I WENT DOWN AS QUICK AS A SINKING ROCK.
I DIDN'T GO ENTIRELY INTO THE BLACK, AS I WAS HOPING.

**Above:** *The Statue* by Portugese creator Carlos Pascoa is described as "a message of warning about how to treat things you might dig up from the ground." It's perhaps a little subtler and a little less high-concept than *Santa Claus Versus The Nazis* or *The First Gentleman Of The Apocalypse*...

You buy it by the volume, each one comprising seven weeks' worth of strips, broken down into three-page episodes. It harkens back to the classic British weekly anthology comics of yore, of which really only *2000 AD* survives. And those old enough to remember Marvel UK's *Titans* reprint title of the '70s will appreciate the wide-screen format of *Aces Weekly*, designed for laptop or PC screens, or tablets held sideways, or even your smart TV.

## AN INTERNATIONAL FLAVOUR

The scope of *Aces Weekly* is vast, with a strong international contingent. In any given volume you might find Lew Stringer's *Viz*-esque *Combat Colin* rubbing shoulders with Herb Trimpe's WWII strip *Firehawks*, or the insane genius of *Santa Claus Versus The Nazis* alongside the Ghibli-ish *The Cat Who Came To Call*. "Eclectic" doesn't even begin to cover it.

"I'm very excited by the truly international flavour of *Aces Weekly*," says Georgiou. "We have contributors from the UK, USA, France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Brazil, the Philippines, New Zealand, Ukraine, Indonesia and China. Fully half our readership also comes from abroad, thanks to David's constant globetrotting."

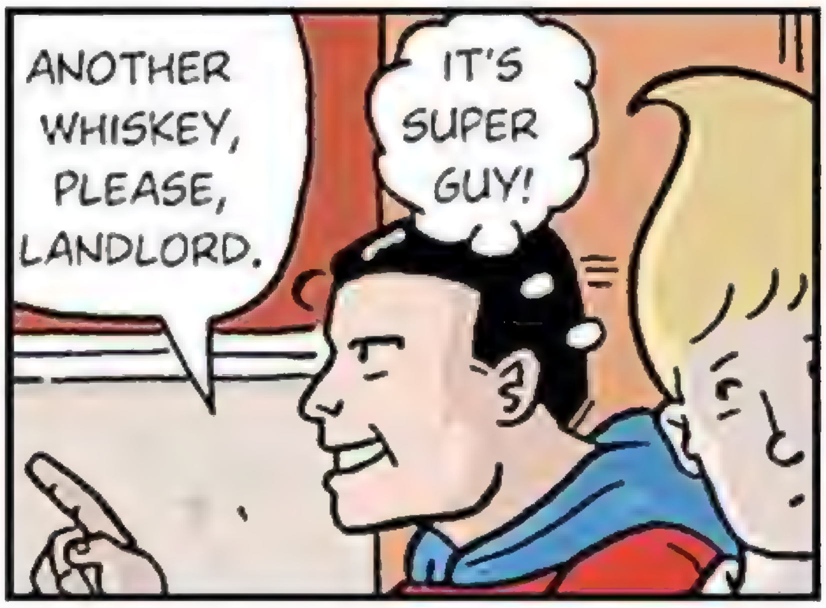
It was Lloyd's globetrotting that birthed the original idea for *Aces Weekly* in the first place, thanks to an encounter at the San Diego Comic-Con with Pepe Moreno, the Spanish comic creator and video game developer perhaps best known to British and American audiences for his work on *Heavy Metal* and *Epic Illustrated* in the '80s.

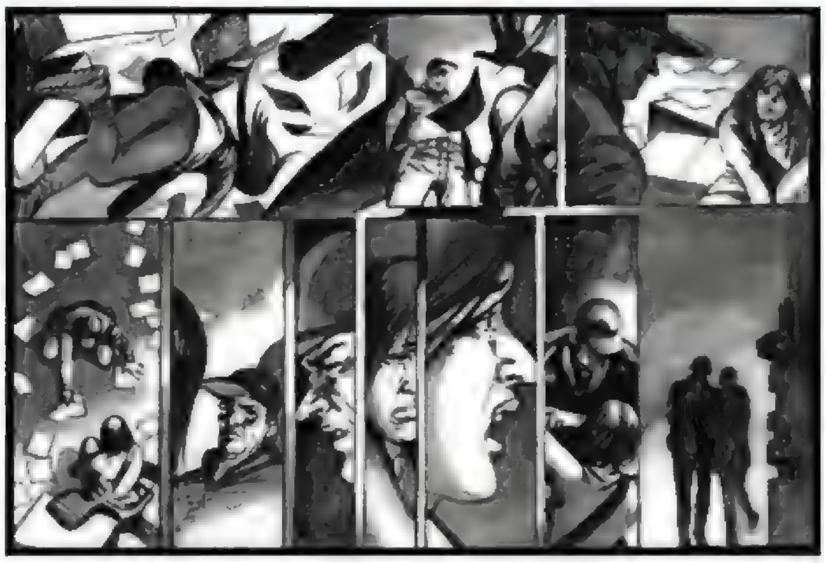
Lloyd says: "I was stimulated to the possibility of an exclusively onscreen anthology by an encounter with Pepe Moreno in San Diego, who was doing comics online then via his own set-up after frustration at losing out on a print book because its repro and other costs had left him with nothing for his creative efforts.

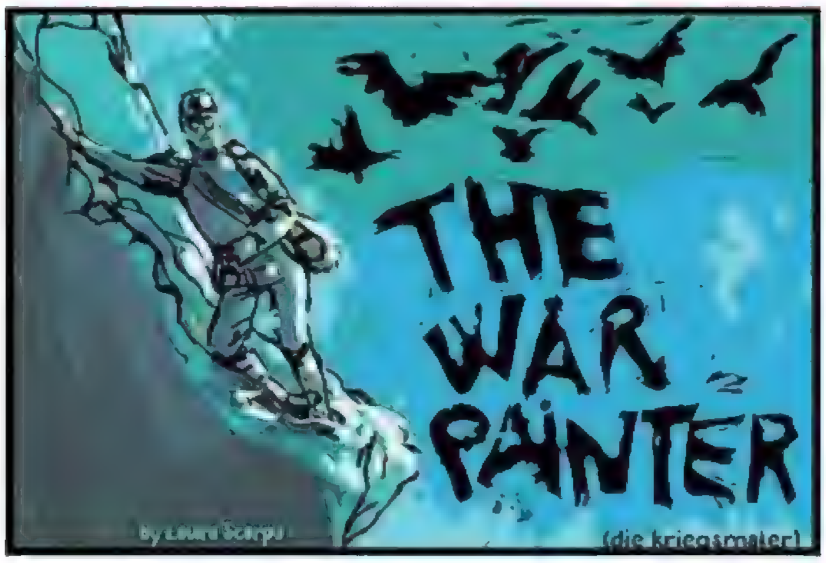
"I initially thought of putting my bunch on his or another similar platform but was persuaded to establish our own brand and site by my co-founder and initial managing editor, Bambos Georgiou. It was a good decision but turned out to be harder work!"

So why is Lloyd, a veteran of print comics going back to his work for Marvel UK in 1979, now such a digital evangelist?

"Printing and regular distribution of comics is an expensive, time-wasting and unnecessary way of telling stories in sequential art when cyberspace gives us a wider and easier alternative," he says. "We're just swapping one surface for another after all to show them on, and


ANOTHER WHISKEY, PLEASE, LANDLORD.
IT'S SUPER GUY!





**Above:** Contrasting styles, different worlds: *Tales Of Gimbley* by Phil Elliot, and *Valley Of The Shadows* by David Lloyd and Dave Jackson.

**Below:** *The War Painter* by Italian creator Laura Scarpa focuses on a war artist sent to the front with the Austrian army in the First World War.

> No long lead time, no restricted page count, and no printing problems – pages look bright and sparkling, with colours just like the artist wanted

they look brilliant on it. Ease of production was what informed the final decision, but creator control and the benefits of direct connection to buyers were major drivers for motivation as well."

Creator ownership of all the *Aces Weekly* strips is a major concern for Lloyd, and a draw for the big names he brings to the product – artists lined up for future volumes include Steve Bissette, Dylan Teague, Hunt Emerson, and Colleen Doran. Lloyd says he's cutting out the middle-man and getting the comics direct from the creators to the readership with a minimum of fuss, which means a better deal for artists and writers.

The way Lloyd enthuses about the *Aces Weekly* ethos – he calls contributors his "Aces" – gives it a feel of a collective built on principles of fairness and equity. Everyone gets a share of the income from each volume, meaning it's in the best interests of the creators to promote their work and the product as much as they can themselves.

## DIGITAL DELIVERY

Don't get too hung up on the word "digital", though – that doesn't mean that the way comics are actually made has to change.

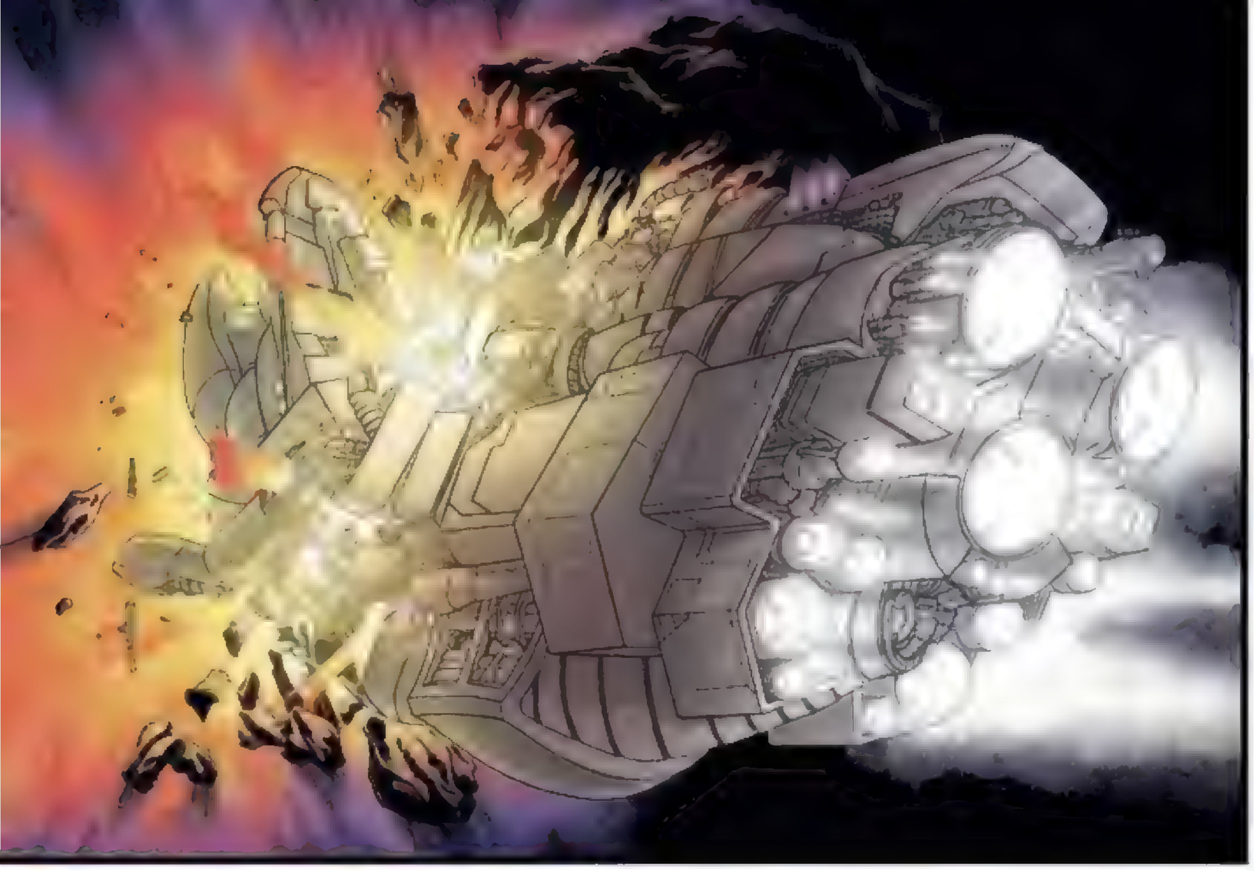
"Digital is only important as a means of delivery to us – nothing else. We changed our advertising from using 'exclusively digital' to 'exclusively onscreen' when I started getting questions like: 'What's it like doing digital art now?' and some confusion on whether digital meant we were technically specific in other ways."

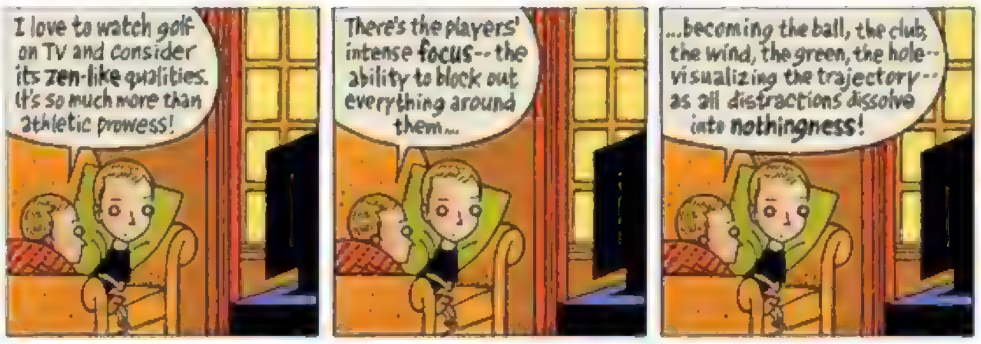
So while many artists do actually produce their strips digitally, others do it the old-fashioned way, too, with pencil and ink on paper. Lloyd says: "The art on *Aces Weekly* *can* be digitally produced – and some of our Aces do produce it that way – but it can be done traditionally too. We just have to scan it to the right res and other specs – no complication is involved."

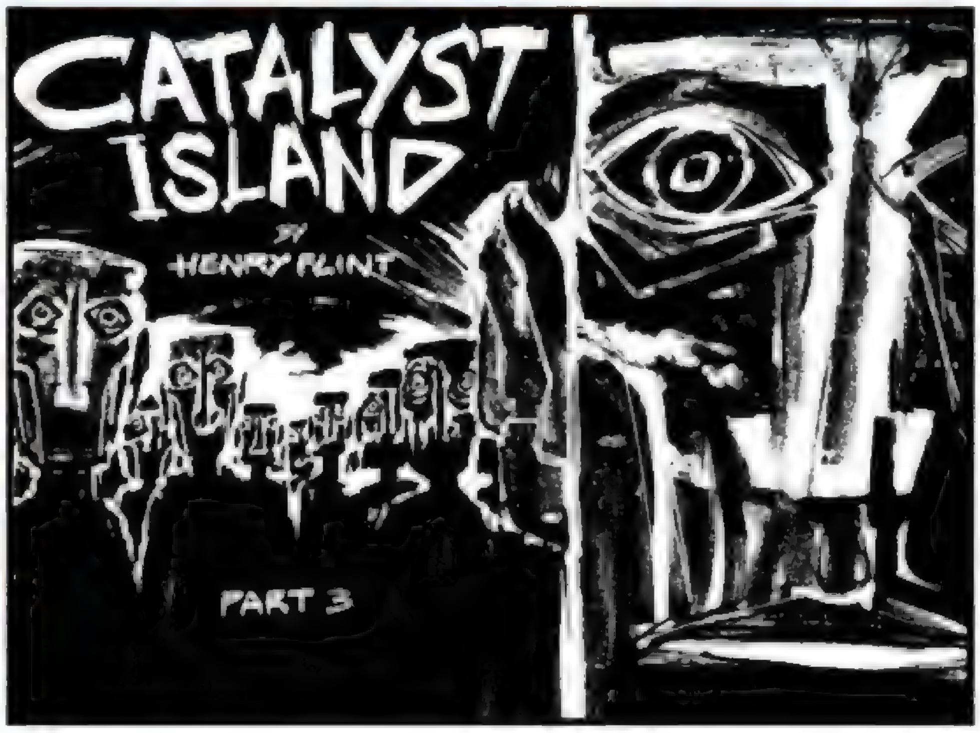
All of which, he says, makes it a far more attractive proposition for publisher, creators and readers compared to producing a printed product. He checks off the advantages: "No long lead time for publication; no restricted page-count, so we can provide as many Extras as our Aces want to give us; *and* we never have any printing problems on our pages – they look sparkling and bright onscreen, with the colours looking just the way the artist wanted them to be."

There's no doubt that the popularity of digital comics is on the rise, especially through platforms such as Comixology, through which all the major publishers sell their wares. It's the ease of obtaining comics that makes digital a big draw for a lot of people – no more having to make the journey to the comic store or waiting for the mail order package to arrive. Comics can be delivered wirelessly at the touch of a button on the day of release.

"We're on Comixology now and we've been on there a while," says Lloyd. "We've got several of >




I love to watch golf on TV and consider its zen-like qualities. It's so much more than athletic prowess!
There's the players' intense focus-- the ability to block out everything around them...
...becoming the ball, the club, the wind, the green, the hole-- visualizing the trajectory-- as all distractions dissolve into nothingness!


CATALYST ISLAND
BY HENRY FLINT
PART 3

**Clockwise from top left:** Where else would you find such an eclectic mix of UK, US and European creators? *Requiem* by Jorge Mongiovi; *The Love Brothers* by Marc Hempel, *Catalyst Island* by Henry Flint; *The Fez* by Roger Langridge; *Dungeons and Burglars* by Jok and Santullo

**Opposite page:** *Psycho Gran* by David Leach and *Clara's Shadow* by Rachael Smith.

**Below:** *Erricus Vane* by Laurence Beverage and Nardo Conforti is set in the world of Grandomina created by rock band Fearless Vampire Killers

> “Collecting has always been part of the motivation, which is why there's resistance to digital from many”

our over-200-page volumes on sale there, and we've been adding them on a monthly basis."

However, although Comixology is "a useful extra sales point," Lloyd prefers to sell direct from the website. He says: "I don't like losing the 50% they charge for our place there. They mostly sell previously-in-print comics from the Big Two, not digital-only, so, though they're successful, they can't be held up as proof of the economic success of digital comics. We prefer always to sell via our website, where only a small fraction of our price goes to maintaining our platform with the rest going to our Aces."

## COLLECTOR GENE THERAPY

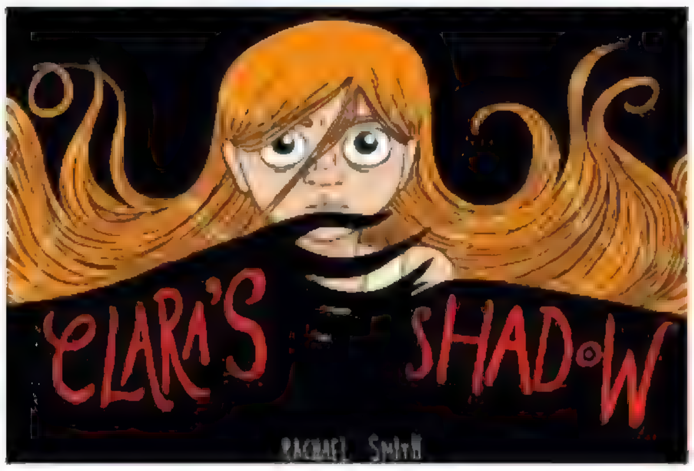
Comic fans, though, are a notoriously acquisitive lot – they have the collector gene. Who doesn't have a couple (or couple of dozen!) long-boxes of comics, all carefully stored in protective sleeves and filed alphabetically or chronologically or according to publisher, character or creator? Is the ease of digital breaking the stranglehold of actual possession of hard-copy comics?

"The jury's out," admits Lloyd. "Young comic readers of the usual industry product and the book-style works of recent years like the 'thing' as much as older ones, though this may change in time. But the collecting element has always been part of comic readership motivation, which is why there's tenacious resistance to digital from many in this particular area of online entertainment."

Readers are happy to buy books and magazines digitally, though. Lloyd says: "The attitude to comics is different to the attitude shown by readers of books, magazines and newspapers in digital form, where 'collecting' is not traditionally a key element of the enjoyment.

"The other thing to bear in mind in the understanding of the younger reader's viewpoint on digital comics is that many are used to comics on the net being

B-BUT I'M INNOCENT!



free – either as backlog manga that publishers can't sell in print any more and are happy to shove on the web, or through the plethora of free webcomix that people just do for fun or to get 'seen' – so digital is difficult to sell to on that basis."

That said, if David Lloyd and his team have embraced the obvious benefits of digital from a publisher's point of view – no printing costs, no warehousing, no transporting comics to all corners of the globe – isn't it just a matter of time before the big publishers do the same?

Lloyd says, "I have a feeling they'd like to, here in the developed Western world. They know that almost all their customers have tablets, laptops, desktops *and* smart TVs – where you can make comics big! They wouldn't lose out.

"If you're producing the amount of product that Marvel and DC do, it's madness not to use the best and cheapest means of reproduction and delivery ever invented. Those companies have long-lasting contracts with their suppliers and distributors, and it might prove difficult for them to do in that light. It would certainly be a game-changer in terms of the readers' perceptions of the importance of the value of the 'thing'."

### SPREADING THE WORD

While Lloyd waits for the rest of the world to catch up with his vision, he does what any pioneer has to – puts in the hours, and evangelises about *Aces Weekly* anywhere and everywhere he can.

You'll catch him at most major cons, though sometimes they can be a hard sell given that he might be sitting at a table with no piles of product to entice people with. He does, though, do a nice line in art cards drawn by Shaky Kane, which you can buy your access codes on, so at least you have something to walk away with.

Evangelical he might be, but David Lloyd is also a realist about the impact of digital on the comics market. When asked if *Aces Weekly* has taken off as well as he hoped it would three years ago, he's brutally honest: "No, it's taken too long to make an impression on the blocking wall of comics readers' addiction to paper, as if comics had to be on paper to be comics, which is as absurd as suggesting that a painting had to be on the wall of a cave before someone figured it could be on something else..."

But he remains doggedly committed to *Aces Weekly* and those who have bought into his vision. If he could go back in time, would he do it all again?

"Sure," he says. He thinks about it for a bit, then adds: "There isn't one pioneering enterprise in history that hasn't had it tough to begin, but it's worth it because we're working for a better situation for all comic creators and for those we serve to entertain."

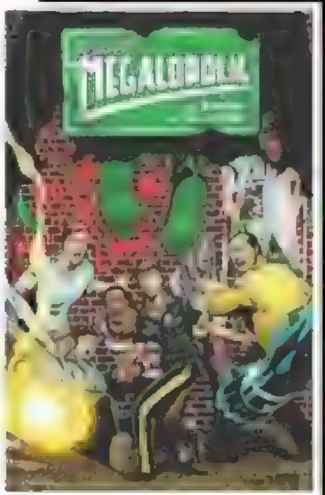
**www.acesweekly.co.uk**

## SUBMIT TO THE DIGITAL FUTURE

**You can get pretty much every major comic that's released in pamphlet form as digital edition, but if *Aces Weekly* has whetted your appetite for digital-only releases, what else is out there?**

*Electricomics* launched just as we went to press and is already looking very exciting. Another good place to start is Comixology's Submit programme, which sells brand-new digital comics by indie creators – it's pretty much self-publishing, but carefully curated by Comixology. John D Roberts, Comixology co-founder and director of Comixology Submit, explains: "Creators just need to sign up, upload a PDF, go through an approval process, and then their work is put up for sale. We split the revenue evenly, with the creator keeping all rights. It's a great deal for creators that don't want to spend money printing a comic. And we've received submissions from every continent except for maybe Antarctica.

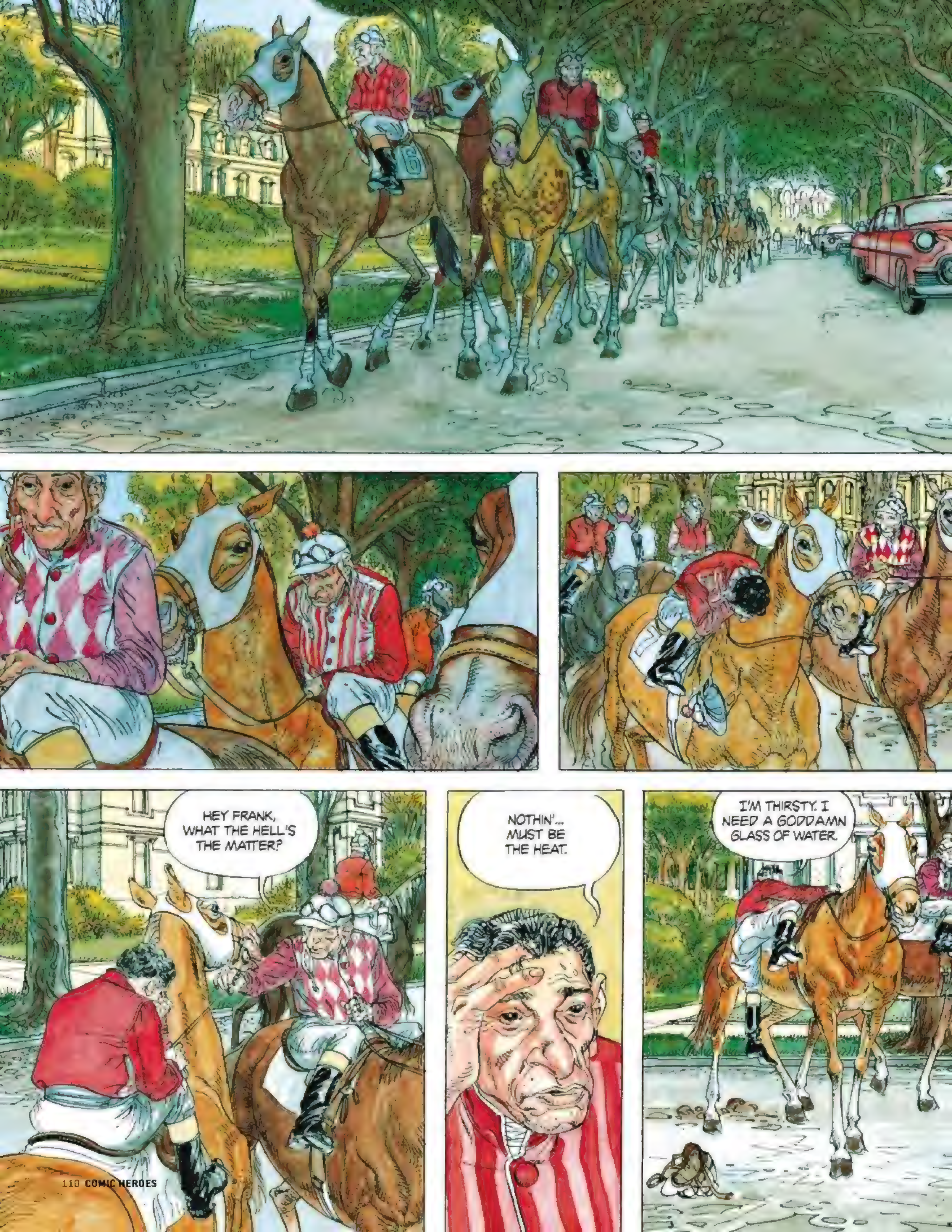
"We review all the submissions and do exert quality control over them," Roberts continues. "We're being entrusted with these creators' content, so we want to make sure that we're presenting it in the best light possible. That also means, from a customer perspective, when they buy a Submit title, they know that it will have a standard of quality."



It's not all unknown creators, either: the bestselling Submit title of 2014 was *Leaving Megalopolis*, a tale of what happens when a city's superheroes turn murderous, by Gail Simone and Jim Calafiore.

Douglas Rushkoff and Liam Sharp's sci-fi title *Testament* is also a big seller.

**Want to find out more? Start by visiting www.comixology.co.uk**


HEY FRANK, WHAT THE HELL'S THE MATTER?
NOTHIN'... MUST BE THE HEAT.
I'M THIRSTY. I NEED A GODDAMN GLASS OF WATER.

## FRANÇOIS BOUCQ

# Twisted Tales

**Paul Gravett** introduces the versatile French virtuoso who brings colourful life to the maverick Westerns of movie-maker **Alejandro Jodorowsky**, the intrigues of novelist **Jerome Charyn** and his own delirious fantasies

In the award-winning graphic novel *The Magician's Wife*, a detective as dapper as Hercule Poirot observes: "People aren't really like the image they try to project... They ignore their own mystery." People, and things, are frequently not what they seem in the unnervingly skewed observations of French comics creator François Boucq.

Drawing came naturally to the self-taught Boucq (rhymes with "Luke") – as he explained in an interview in *Libération* in early 2015, the question for him was never *why do you draw* but "Why do you stop drawing? Because everyone draws, even before writing. Drawing is a way of testing everything you say to yourself when you are a child. It's only later, insidiously, that we're taught to write. And that puts us into another universe. Anyone who carries on drawing resists that and can keep on experimenting."

Boucq was born in 1955 and raised in Lille, the second of four boys. His father ran a plumbing company, his mother traded in antiques. Boucq contributed artwork behind the scenes to the local theatre and designed huge-headed figures for the city's street carnival. He became fascinated with drawings that blur the borders between the everyday and the extraordinary that can lurk beneath the surface.

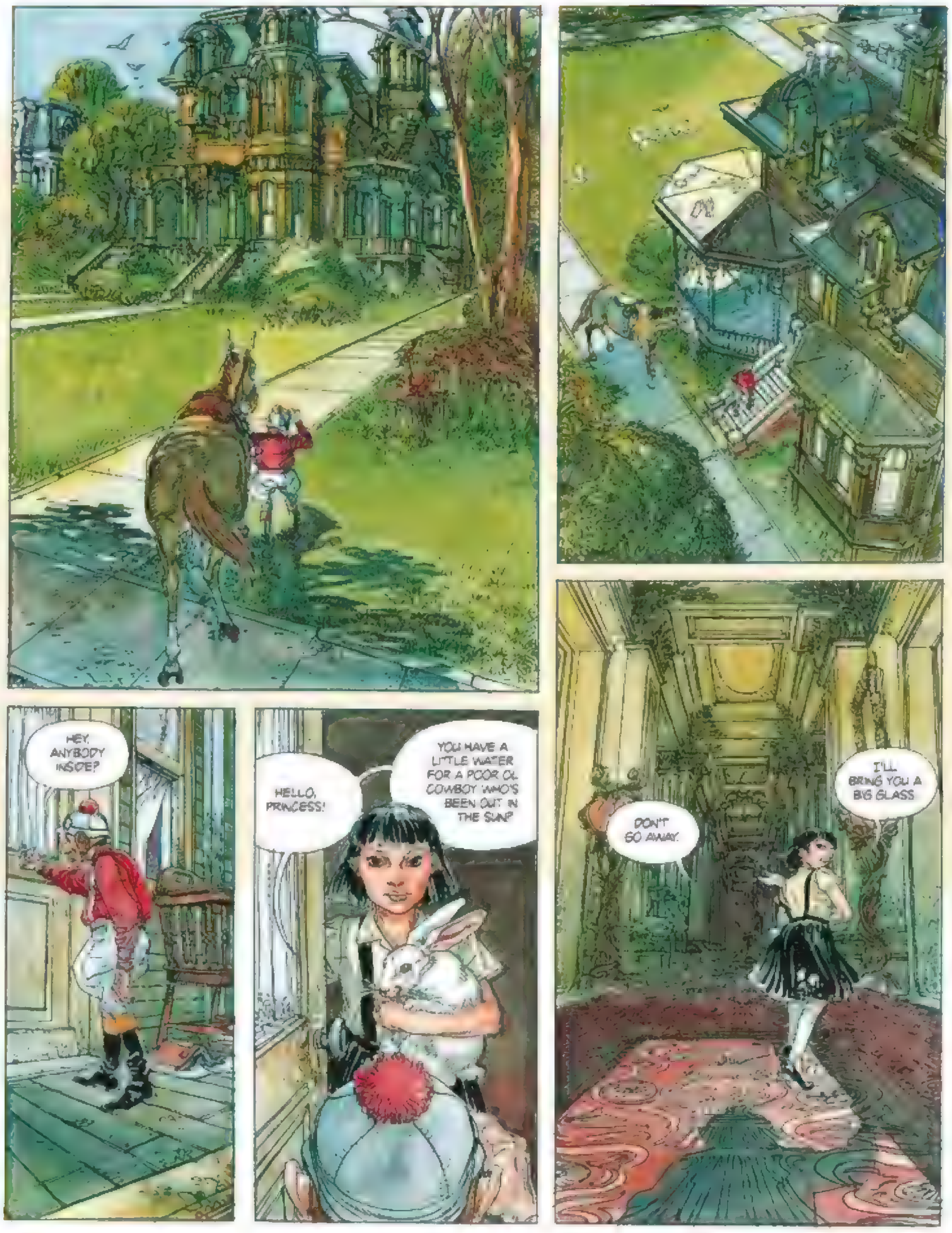
After failing his exams, the young Boucq quit college and took the train to Paris to hawk his illustrations. His professional debut came in 1975 when he was hired as political cartoonist for *Le Point*. He went on to contribute to other periodicals, caricaturing the true faces of politicians and celebrities. When he decided to try his hand at crafting comics, it was time to return home. "I tried living the Parisian life, but I didn't find the

ALL IMAGES © FRANÇOIS BOUCQ & THEIR RESPECTIVE CREATORS

same vibes there as in Lille. Here, you get both a lively atmosphere and a kind of tranquillity which suits me better than the frenzy of Paris. Comics demand a certain remoteness from events."

Boucq's debut comedy skits, all black-and-white strips written by others, got him notice and his first album collection in 1981. This led in 1983 to the French literary bande dessinée monthly *À Suivre* asking him to produce short stories of his own in colour. To free himself from recurring characters and formulas, Boucq set himself the challenge of starting each yarn afresh and pursuing a different odd situation to its most absurd conclusion. In his artwork, he overlaid gloriously vibrant washes of coloured inks to heighten the vivid details of his pen-and-ink line drawings and to instil each tale with a different narrative atmosphere.

His taste for the grotesque and the philosophical resulted in some unforgettable scenarios worthy of Monty Python. A mama's boy hooked on war stories is taken hostage in his home by enemy troops seeking those "little cups of yogurt with real fruit at the bottom", only to be rescued by his machine-gun-toting mother. For a devout nun, the aisles of a supermarket turn into a gauntlet of temptations fought over between her angelic and devilish sides.


HEY, ANYBODY INSIDE?
HELLO, PRINCESS!
YOU HAVE A LITTLE WATER FOR A POOR OL' COWBOY WHO'S BEEN OUT IN THE SUN?
DON'T GO AWAY.
I'LL BRING YOU A BIG GLASS.

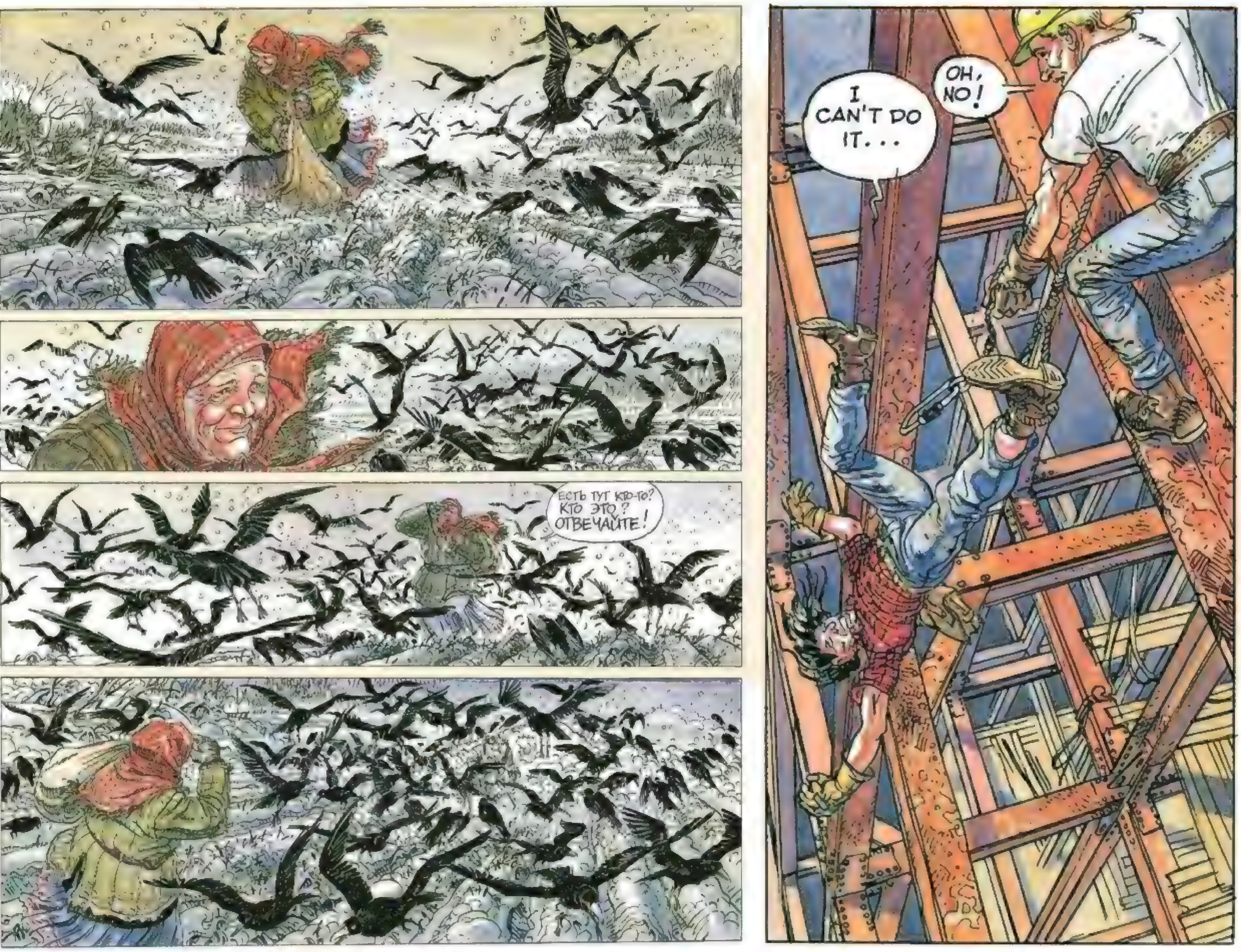
**Above:** *The Magician's Wife* – not to be confused with a thriller of the same title by James M Cain or the best-selling historical novel by Brian Moore – is a dark and oddly disturbing masterwork

> "You can't work in comics if you don't work hard. You need calm"

Boucq also sends up the wildlife documentary in several examples, from the bizarre egg-laying habits of turtles on crowded beaches to the nocturnal activities of construction machinery building a Metro station on the Savannah. These and other shorts were compiled into several French collections, one of which came out in English in 1989 as *Pioneers Of The Human Adventure* from Catalan Communications (1989). A number also appeared in English in *Heavy Metal* magazine.

Out of these one-offs emerged Boucq's one continuing character, the small but heroic door-to-door insurance salesman Jérôme Moucherot. For him, life is truly a jungle out there. The journey to work is bad enough, dodging pterodactyls, crocodiles and cannibal punks. Somehow he battles through the day, sporting his leopard-spotted yellow suit, hat and tie, his zebra-striped briefcase and a fountain pen through his nose.

Boucq's own daily ritual involves working in his studio from 8.30am to 9 at night and no later. "You can't work in comics if you don't work hard. Drawing is a state of being – of being both active and meditative – so to finish your work well, you need calm." After studying judo as a boy, he tried aikido when he was 30. Nowadays


ЕСТЬ ТУТ КТО-ТО? КТО ЭТО? ОТВЕЧАЙТЕ!
I CAN'T DO IT...
OH, NO!

**Above:** After *The Magician's Wife*, Boucq and Jerome Charyn collaborated again on *Billy Budd, KGB*. Like the title itself, the story juxtaposes the USSR and the US in ways that frequently subvert your expectations.

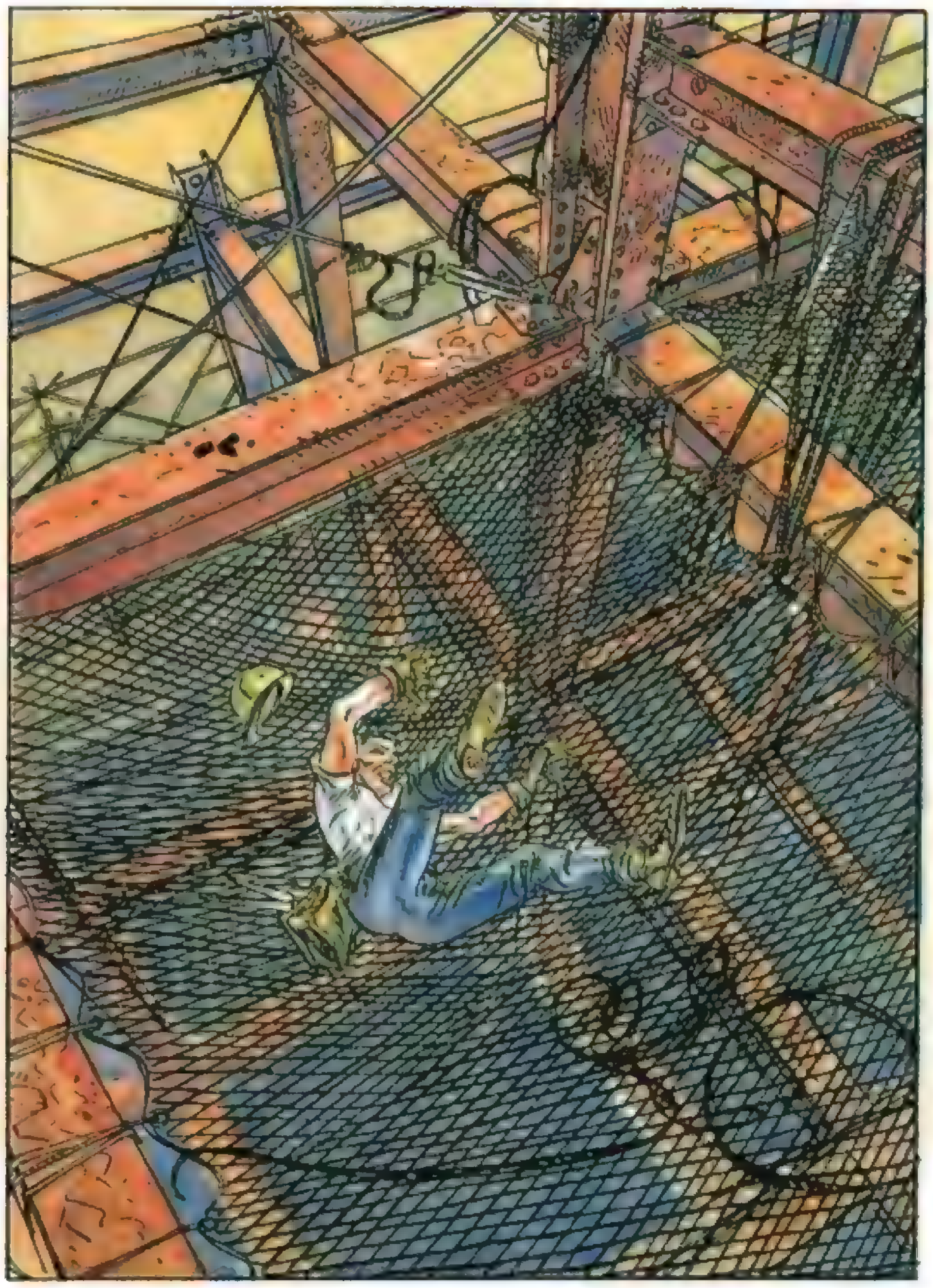
he practises kendo or Japanese fencing three times a week and has advanced as far as a fifth-dan black belt. Martial and comics arts have parallels, he says: "In kendo, there's no room for hesitation. When you have to strike a blow, you strike. It's the same with drawing – the line must be just right."

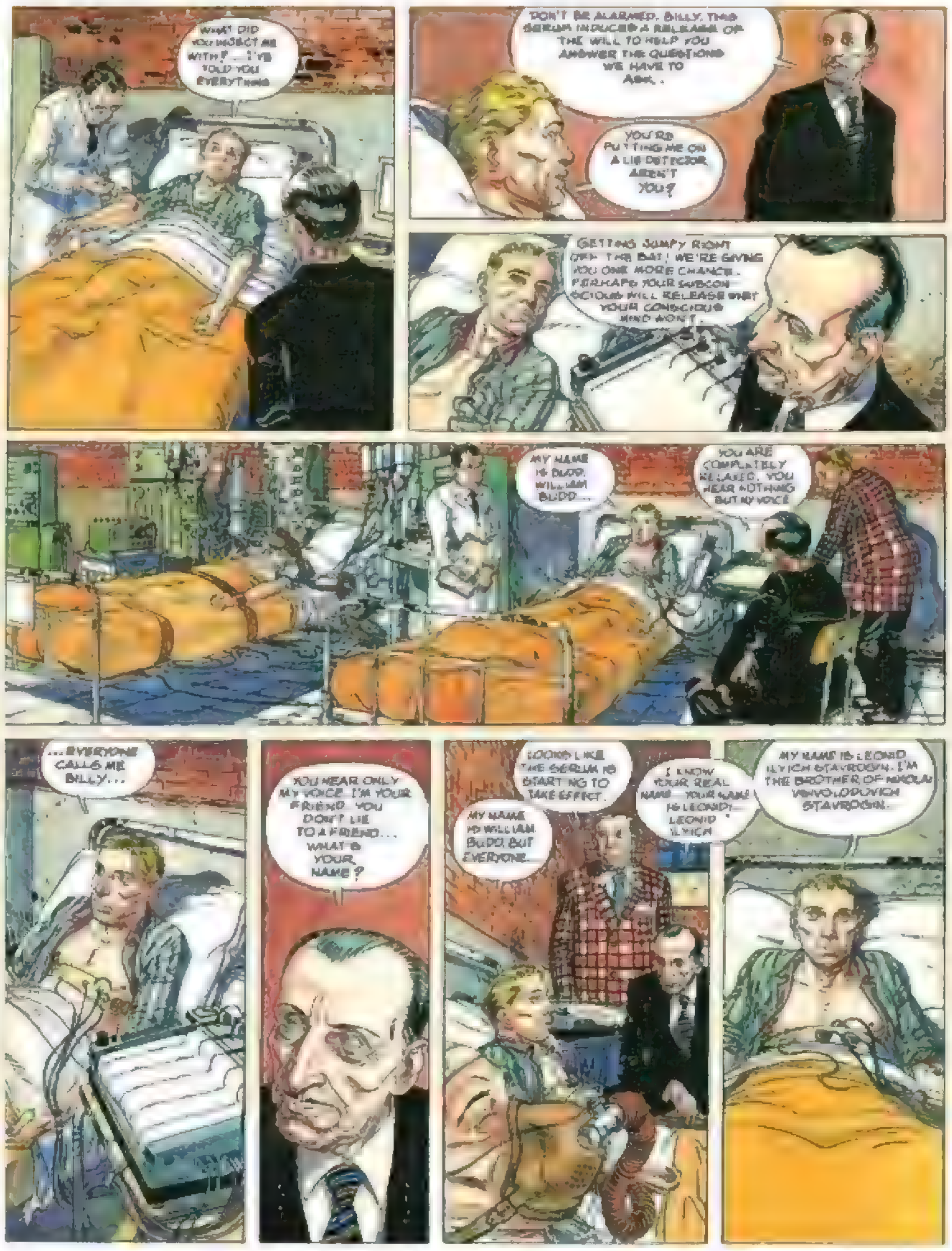
## DRAWING FOR THE READER

Explaining his methods, Boucq says that when he draws, "I always imagine the reader leaning on my shoulder. I speculate about how he takes in the story… I try to surprise him, grab his attention, direct his gaze. Everything happens through the ordering of the images, the rhythm, colours, symmetry, opposites, visual stimuli. We don't have all the tools of cinema, the music, the actors. So to stir up emotion, comics play a lot on the reader's unconscious perception."

Amidst all this activity, Boucq stretched himself still further by collaborating on his first full-length graphic novel and developing for it a more realistic style. The writer was new to the medium. Jerome Charyn, son of Jewish emigrés from Russia and Poland, was born and raised in the Bronx. He had learnt to read from Carl Barks's *Donald Duck* and CC Beck's *Captain Marvel* and discovered literature through *Classics Illustrated*. Charyn grew up to be an English professor and writer of unconventional crime novels and surreal urban fables. His passion for comics was revived in Paris by his discovery of adult bande dessinée albums. For his first try at writing one, Charyn re-worked an abandoned novel, which Boucq then reinterpreted into comics.

Storemags.com




WHAT DID YOU INJECT ME WITH? ... I'VE TOLD YOU EVERYTHING
DON'T BE ALARMED, BILLY. THIS SERUM INDUCES A RELEASE OF THE WILL TO HELP YOU ANSWER THE QUESTIONS WE HAVE TO ASK.
YOU'RE PUTTING ME ON A LIE DETECTOR AREN'T YOU?
GETTING JUMPY RIGHT OFF THE BAT! WE'RE GIVING YOU ONE MORE CHANCE. PERHAPS YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS WILL RELEASE WHAT YOUR CONSCIOUS MIND WON'T.
MY NAME IS BUDD. WILLIAM BUDD...
YOU ARE COMPLETELY RELAXED. YOU HEAR NOTHING BUT MY VOICE
...EVERYONE CALLS ME BILLY...
YOU HEAR ONLY MY VOICE. I'M YOUR FRIEND. YOU DON'T LIE TO A FRIEND... WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
LOOKS LIKE THE SERUM IS STARTING TO TAKE EFFECT.
MY NAME IS WILLIAM BUDD, BUT EVERYONE...
I KNOW YOUR REAL NAME... YOUR NAME IS LEONID... LEONID ILYICH
MY NAME IS LEONID ILYICH STAVROGIN. I'M THE BROTHER OF NIKOLAI VSEVOLODOVICH STAVROGIN.

> ❝We don't have all the tools of cinema, so comics play on unconscious perceptions❞

The result was the unsettling love story *The Magician's Wife* (Casterman,1984). Edmund, an ambitious young illusionist, as white-haired and pink-eyed as the rabbits in his hat, has had his eye on Rita since she was a girl. Edmund begins by seducing Rita's mother, the housekeeper, into running off with him and her daughter and forming his magic act. But all the while he is also manipulating Rita into taking her ageing mother's place on stage as well as becoming his young bride.

What Edmund has not reckoned with is his mind games sparking Rita's rage and unleashing the werewolf within her. She flees and tries to lose herself in New York City, but she cannot escape her curse – or escape being haunted by Edmund.

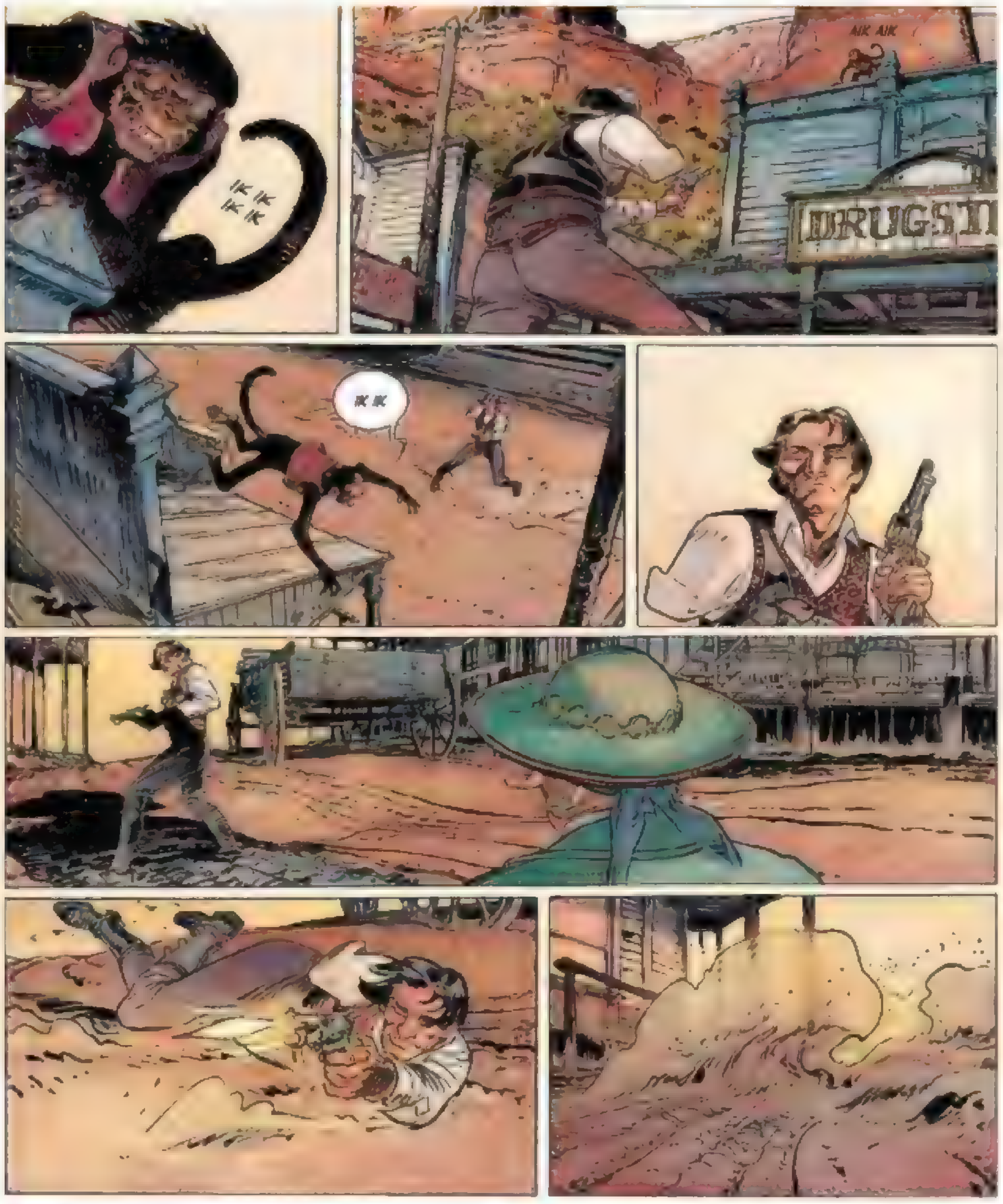
Boucq's new realism is stunningly convincing, shifting from sprawling mansions and seedy tenements to shimmering dreamscapes and a surreal showdown. Rita returns to find Edmund enslaved, but her kiss rekindles his powers. Together they can make magic.

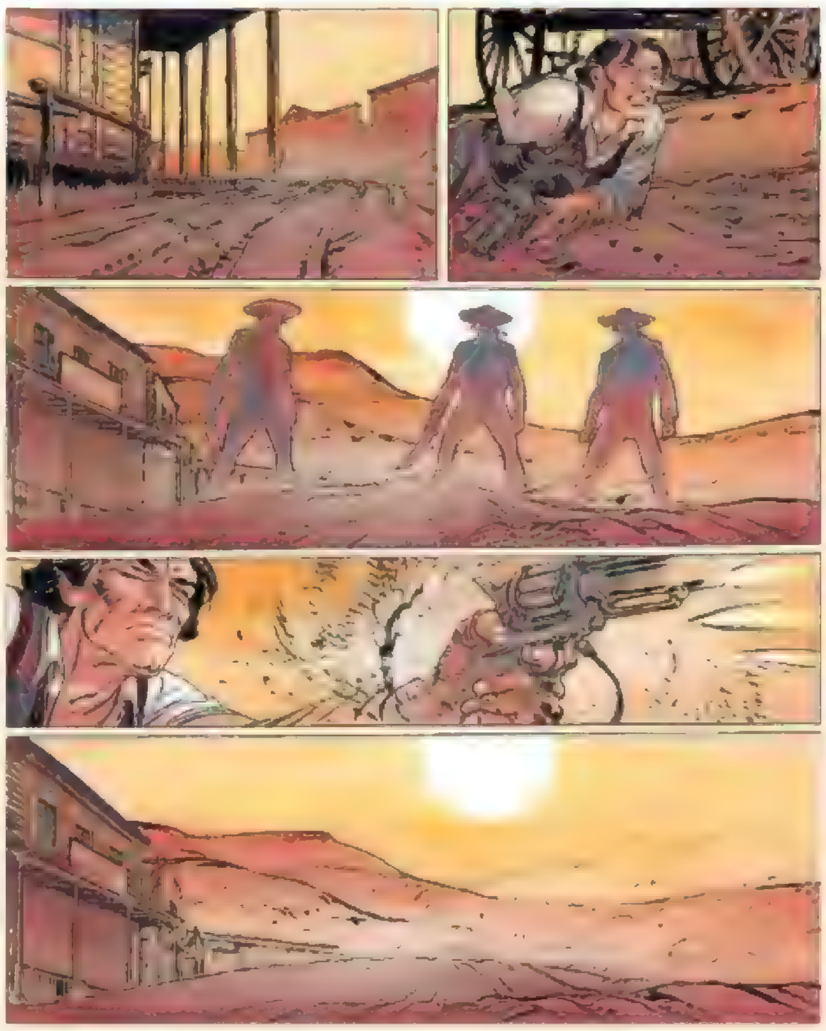
Following rave reviews, this strange, hypnotic book scooped the prize in 1986 for the best French-language graphic novel at the Angoulême International Comics Festival, the largest comics event in the world, not counting Asia. If you haven't discovered this gem, out of print for nearly 30 years, Dover Books has just re-released it.

**Above:** *Billy Budd, KGB* was first published in English by Catalan Communications in 1991 – remarkably apt considering that the Cold War came to an abrupt end with the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of that year.

### COUNTRY OF THE MIND

Charyn and Boucq followed this up with *Billy Budd, KGB* (Casterman, 1989), about a Ukrainian orphan with a harelip who is recruited into the Russian secret service. Given corrective surgery and a forged passport, Budd has to assume a double life in New York. In public, he's a construction





worker on skyscrapers; in secret, he's an undercover agent prized for his nightmare premonitions. When he saves the life of a Native American co-worker, he builds a bond with the man's chief, who introduces Budd to a path different from both Communism and the American dream. But can Budd escape his masters? The result weaves together a Cold War psycho-thriller with one man's quest for spiritual truth. Dover will reprint this as well next year.

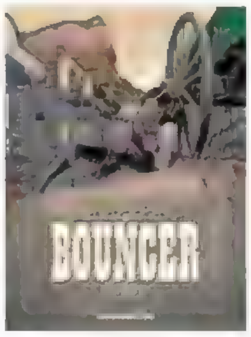
After these and a one-off illustrated travelogue of New York, Charyn and Boucq went their own ways. Theirs had not been the smoothest of writer-artist partnerships, but their respect was always mutual and their exchanges courteous, even if it's typically Boucq who gets the last word. That's because, rather than sticking to a "closed" final script, he prefers a more open story which he can develop and elaborate.

In 2014, after 25 years, the two men joined forces again on a new graphic novel, after Boucq discovered the published sketchbooks of a Russian guard, Danzig Baldaev, whose naive but meticulous drawings captured the unseen world of Siberian prison camps, most famously written about by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Boucq's suggestion soon convinced Charyn – after all, his family background is Russian, so this tale was in his blood.

The title *Little Tulip* is the nickname of Paul, a brilliant Russian tattoo artist who grew up in Stalin's gulags and around their mafia gangs. Escaping to the Big Apple, Paul becomes famous for his tattoos and his incredible faithful ID portraits of wanted criminals, which, so far, have helped the police. But one mysterious serial killer evades Paul's gifts, and the unfolding case soon brings back ghosts from Paul's Soviet past. Boucq deliberately chose "to make the characters in *Little Tulip* resemble those in our two previous albums. I wanted to make links, because even with so many years apart, they form a whole. They are a trilogy." To complete this, *Little Tulip* will also follow in English from Dover.

## HEADING WEST

Meanwhile, starting in 1991, Boucq had taken to collaborating closely with Chilean-born filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky, famed for his weird Westerns *El Topo* and *Santa Sangre*. They began with a series (eventually five volumes, concluded in 2004) of mystical science fiction featuring Face de Lune, a seemingly invincible, moon-faced mute messiah of the



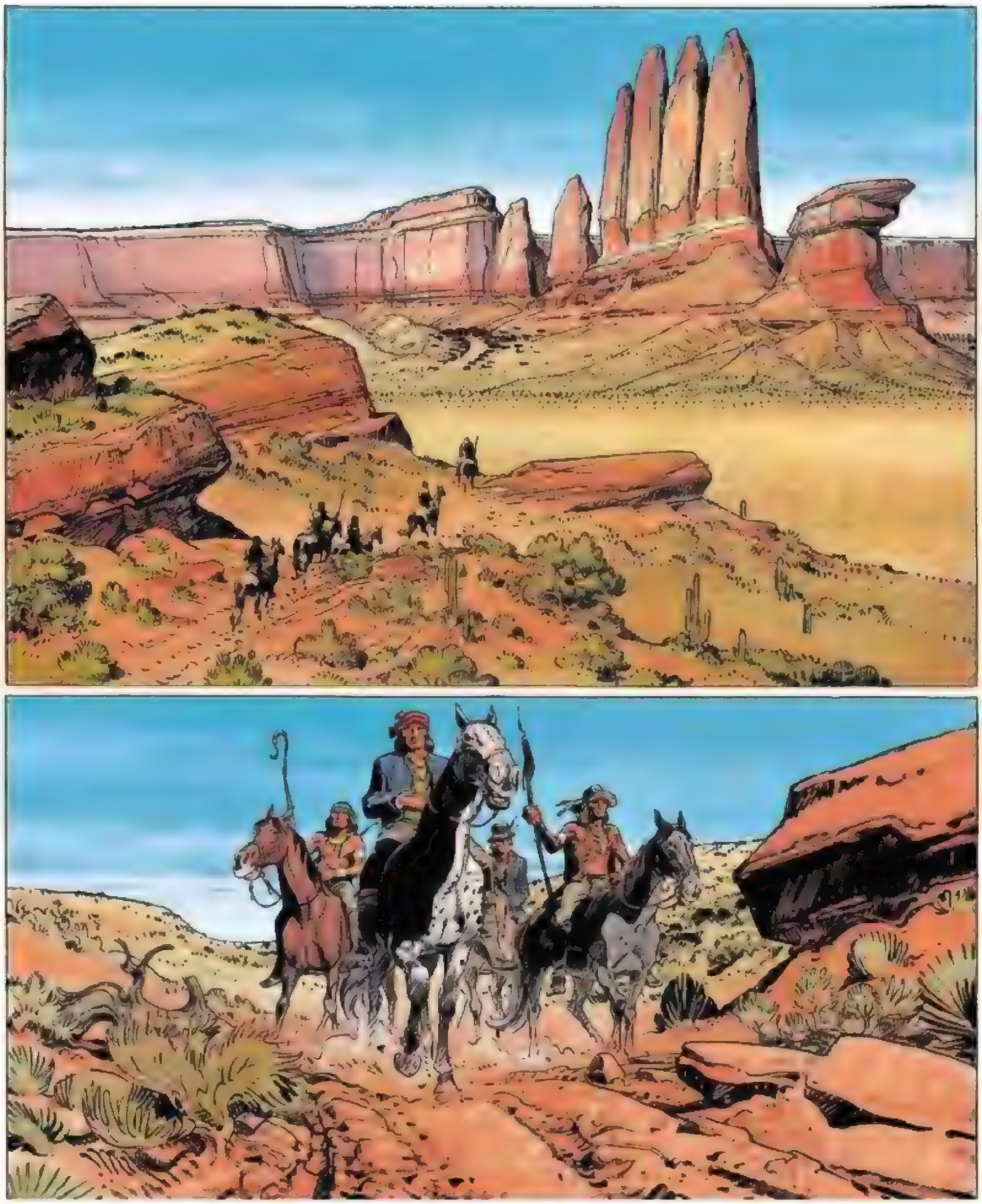
**Above:** Jodorowsky has always been fascinated by the American Old West, and his latest collaboration with Boucq grew out of a conscious desire to produce a more literary – indeed a Shakespearean – Western. It still delivers some gunfights, though

storemags

future, who tries to help the sheep-like masses against a despotic politico-religious government.

While pursuing this, the pair switched from fantasy in 2001 to launch another series together, *Bouncer* (available in English from Humanoids Publishing), marking Jodorowsky's return to the Wild West. From the start, Boucq was enthused by Jodorowsky's desire to "create a Shakespearean Western. We wanted to take the genre towards something more ambitious and literary. And more historically faithful. So not being inspired by John Ford or Sergio Leone films, but trying to recreate this past, especially from photos."

In the first episode, one loveless family's greed for a diamond drives a mother to suicide, her three sons against each other, and one young grandson to swear vengeance for his parents' slaughter. The third brother, now a one-armed bouncer, undertakes to train the boy to kill, in return for being his right arm. Jodorowsky is in his element again and, whether in widescreen landscapes or saloon shootouts, Boucq's art has never looked so gritty and visceral. Over the course of nine albums so far, their twisted Western gets darker still.



**Above:** There's probably some deep cultural reason why European film-makers and artists are able to produce such iconic visions of the Old West. Boucq sure draws nice, though, don't he?

> *"We wanted to take the Western towards the ambitious and literary"*

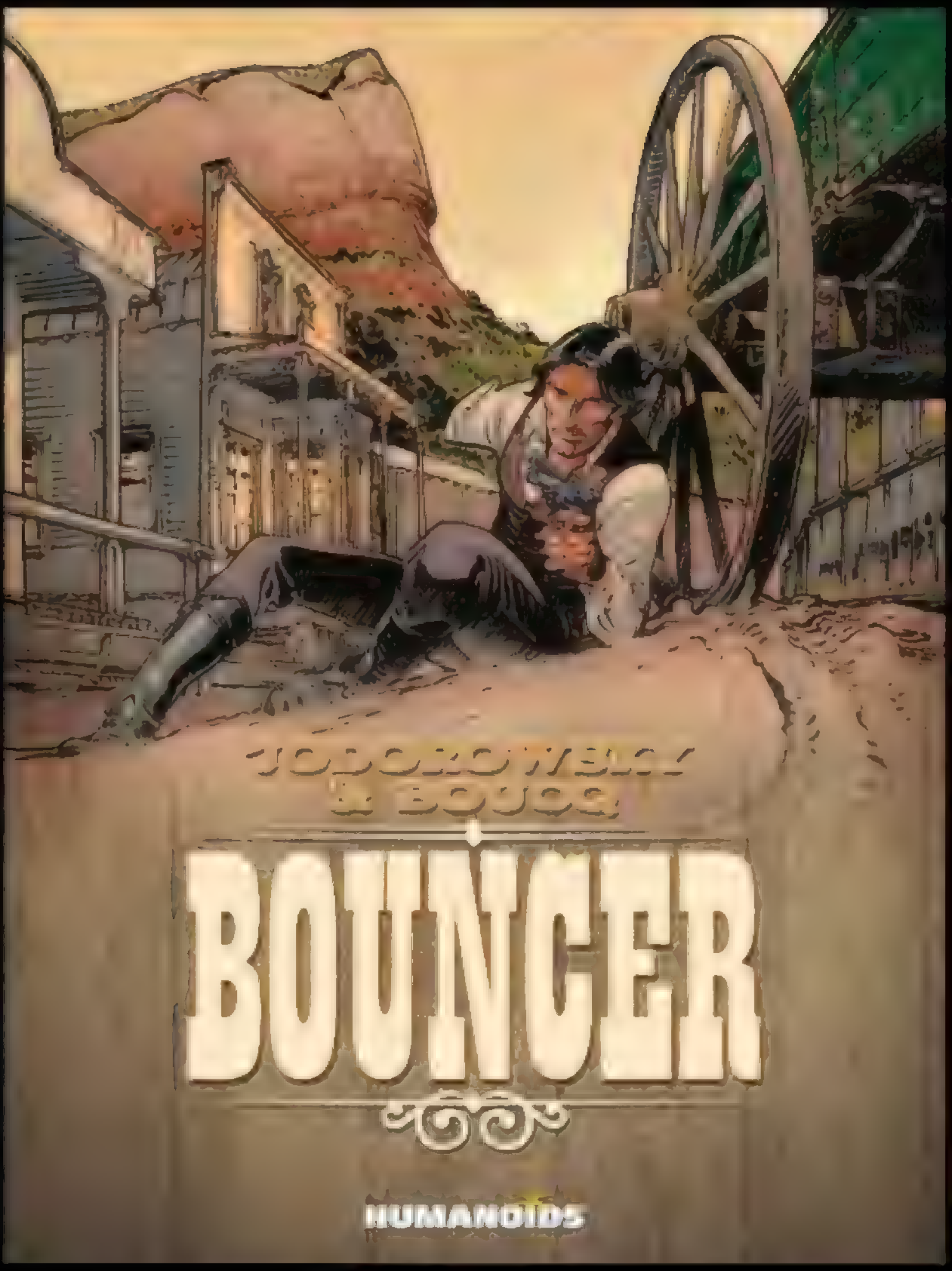
## STILL DRAWING

Boucq's prolific output also includes the slick thriller series *Janitor* written by Yves Sente since 2007, and one instalment of the *XIII Mystery* sequels with Didier Alcante. His newest collaboration brings him back to his satirical roots, reviving Superdupont, that most French of superhero parodies in his beret, underwear and slippers, with Marcel Gotlib, who created him with Jacques Lob and the artist Alexis in 1972 in *Pilote* magazine. Notoriously, one episode was drawn by American superstar artist Neal Adams. *Superdupont: Rebirth* was released by Dargaud in September and a sequel is already in the works.

Hollywood has come calling, although neither of *Bouncer*'s co-creators has been consulted by those involved in bringing their Western to the big screen. The director will be Floria Sigismondi, creator of numerous videos for David Bowie, Sigur Rós, Jack White, Marilyn Manson and others; casting is underway and shooting should get started in 2016. But why wait, when you can already enjoy the best movie Jodorowsky never made, ravishingly realised by Boucq, on the pages of their unmissable graphic novels. CH

# WIN!

# ONE OF THREE COPIES OF BOUNCER



Bouncer is a one-armed gunslinger and the last word in law and order in the Inferno Saloon. Written by visionary film director Alejandro Jodorowsky and drawn with brutal intensity by the maestro, François Boucq, this is a western classic. And, thanks to our kind friends at Humanoids, we have three lush hardback copies to give away.

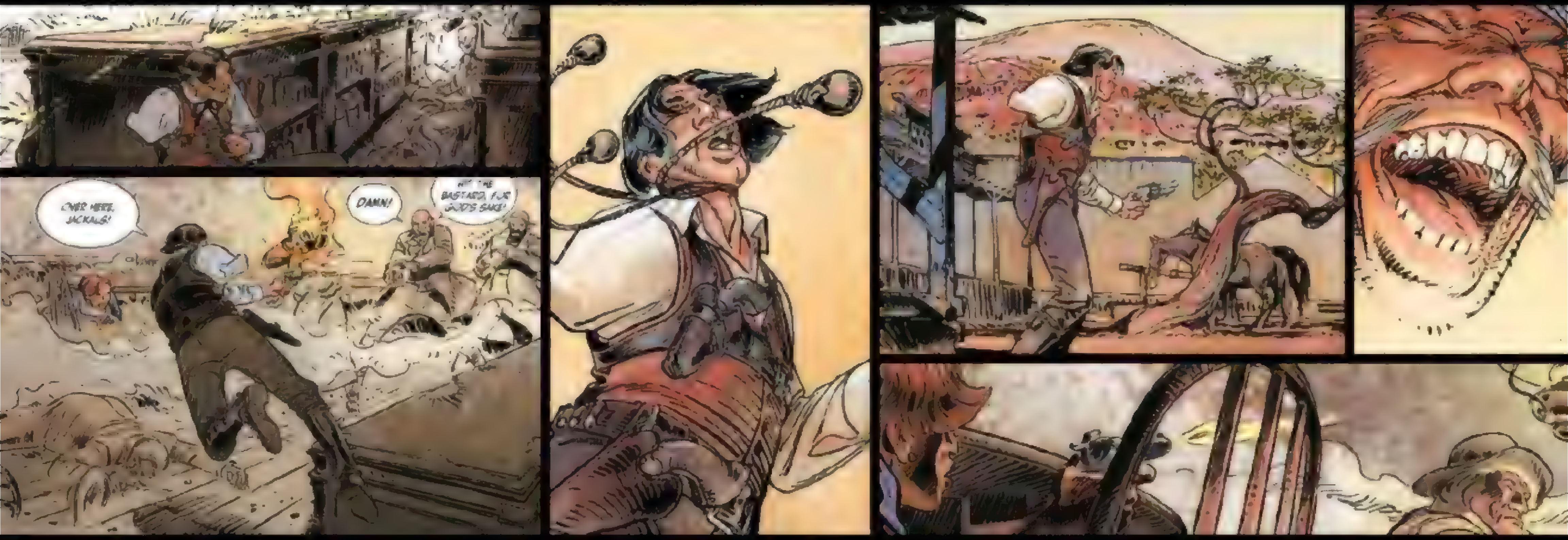
To be in with a chance of winning a copy, simply answer this question:

**Which of these is *not* an Alejandro Jodorowsky film?**

**A) El Topo**
**B) El Mariachi**
**C) The Holy Mountain**

**HOW TO ENTER...**

Simply head to this link:
www.futurecomps.co.uk/bouncer
And submit the correct answer


OVER HERE, JACKALS!
DAMN!
HIT THE BASTARD, FOR GOD'S SAKE!

**TERMS & CONDITIONS:** Enter the Comic Heroes Bouncer competition online at www.futurecomps.co.uk/bouncer between Friday 9 October 2015 and midnight Saturday 9 January 2016. Prize is as stated and cannot be transferred or refunded. No cash alternative will be offered. This competition is only open to people aged 18 or over. The winners will be selected at random from all the correct entries received between the relevant dates and winners will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Winners will be required to give details of a delivery address in the UK to which prizes should be sent. Free entry, as well as full terms and conditions, are available online at www.futurecomps.co.uk/bouncer, but please note that we cannot accept postal entries. Unless otherwise stated, Comic Heroes competitions are open to all UK residents of 18 years and over, except employees of: (a) the company; (b) any third party appointed by the Company to organise and/or manage the Competition; and (c) the Competition sponsor(s). By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services of Future which may be of interest to you.

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# COMICS WE RATE

The next 16 pages are crammed to the gills with reviews of the latest comics and graphic novels...

GET READY TO SCREAM FOR...
...BLACK CANARY!

BRAKK!
TAKKA TAKKA TAKK

**120** The Twilight Children
**121** Unfollow
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**132** JLA
**132** Virgil
**133** Elsie Harris PicturePalace
**133** Dead Vengeance
**134** Sherlock Holmes: The Seven Per-Cent Solution
**134** 2000 AD
**135** Secret Wars
**135** Mutafukaz

# The Twilight Children

**Reviewed:** Issue 1
**Writer:** Gilbert Hernandez
**Artist:** Darwyn Cooke
**Publisher:** DC Vertigo
**Format:** 4-part series
★★★★★

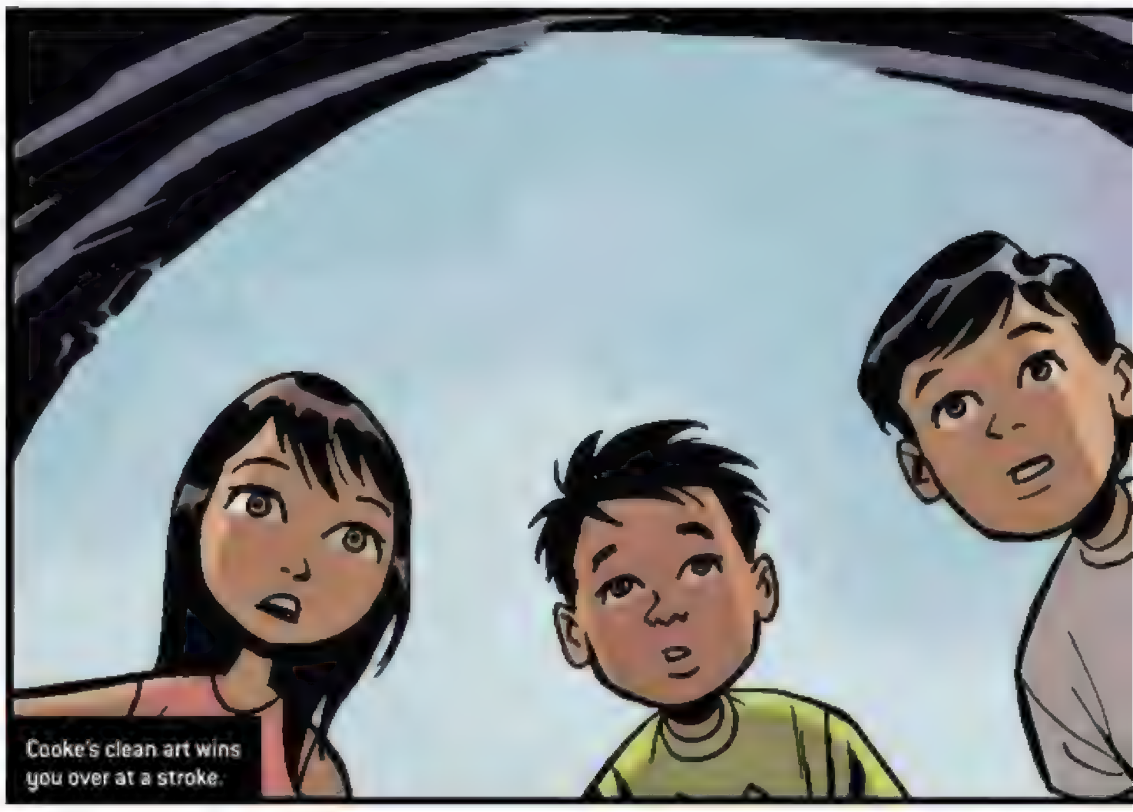
THE TWILIGHT CHILDREN

**There's a lot riding on the new slate of Vertigo titles launching this autumn. But from these two new debuts, it's all looking very promising...**

First of all, take a look at the creative team behind *The Twilight Children* – it's a one-two punch of comics loveliness. Writing the series is *Love And Rockets* co-creator Gilbert Hernandez. His work has long been known for bringing magic realist oddness to small-town Mexico – most notably in the Palomar stories. And so it proves here. The seaside village at the heart of the story is the sort of remote idyll you dream about visiting. The people who live here aren't overly idealised, though. The first thing we learn about Tito and Anton, the apparent protagonists of the series, is that they are having an illicit affair. We don't know the backstory, but neither is judgmentally portrayed as a bad person. The local drunk is also sympathetically portrayed. He's a laughable figure to the local kids, but his story is genuinely moving and tragic.

## The everyday extraordinary

Over in the art corner, we have the mighty Darwyn Cooke, bringing his A-List skills to a less flashy, but no less enthralling, story than his superhero work. The first issue of *The Twilight Children* is almost all faces and places, with not a fight in sight. But that's wonderful. Very few artists around can match Cooke at capturing human forms and expression so simply and economically. In a single panel, for instance, we know everything about Anton's sense of shame. It's a really handsome looking comic, with excellent colour work.



Cooke's clean art wins you over at a stroke.

"LIKE SALMAN RUSHDIE WRITING THE PRISONER"

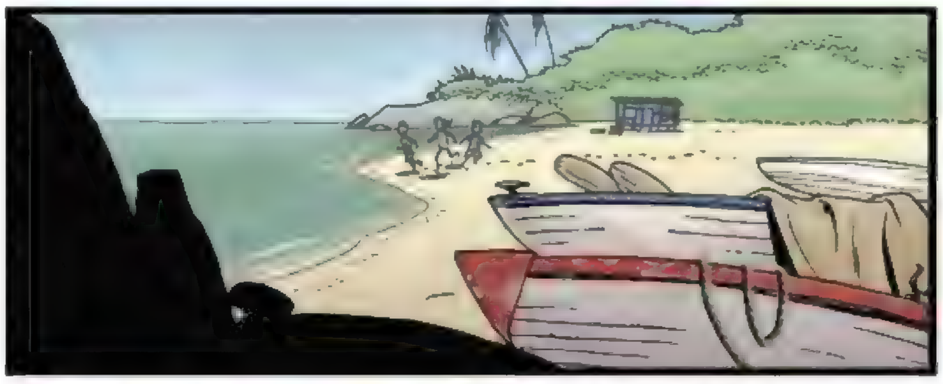
## Enthralling debut

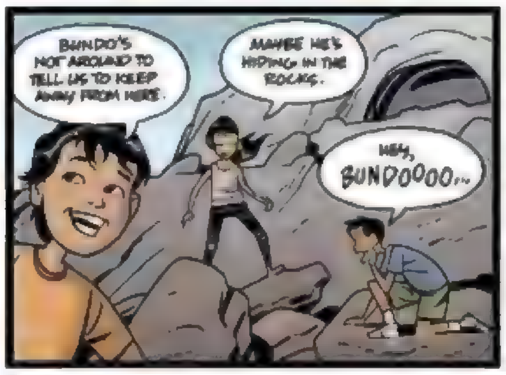
A lot of plot ground is covered quickly – necessary, as there's just a scant four issues. All seems normal in the sleepy fishing village where the story is set, but that's disrupted by the ominous arrival of a glowing white orb. Rather than being surprised, however, it turns out that the locals are used to these objects appearing and disappearing seemingly at random. The mystery deepens when Tito is visited by one of the orbs in the night – and then a trio of children from the village get themselves embroiled in events.

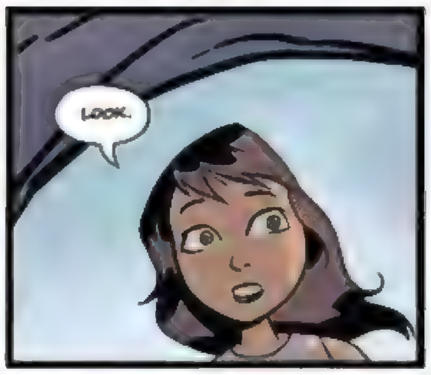
The effect is akin to Angela Carter or Salman Rushdie writing an episode of *The Prisoner*. The orb that appears on the beach immediately recalls that show's famous Rover – and it's just as much of a surreal visual jolt.

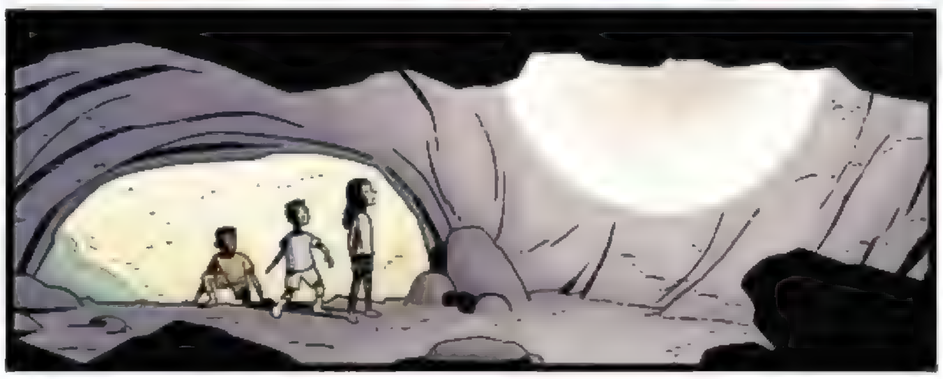
Where the book goes from here, we've no idea. But this is an exciting, engaging and emotional debut issue that makes you both eager for part two, and sad that it will be over so soon. *The Twilight Children* is simply thrilling.

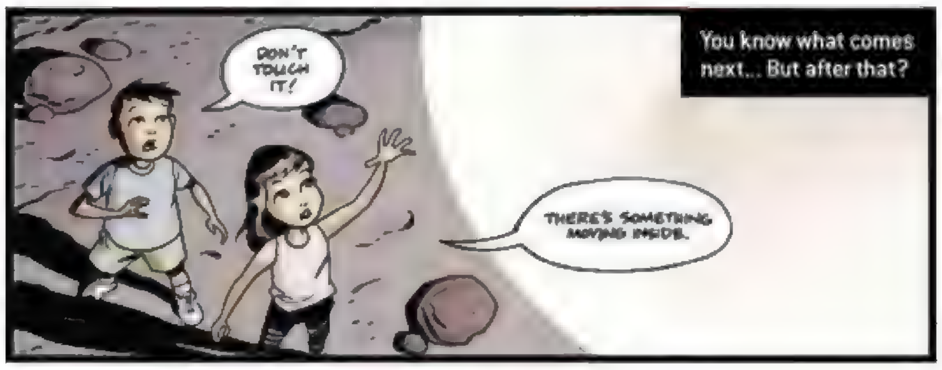
**Will Salmon**




BUNDO'S NOT AROUND TO TELL US TO KEEP AWAY FROM HERE.
MAYBE HE'S HIDING IN THE ROCKS.
HEY, BUNDOOOO...






DON'T TOUCH IT!
THERE'S SOMETHING MOVING INSIDE.

You know what comes next... But after that?

storemags.com

# Unfollow

**Reviewed:** Issue 1
**Writer:** Rob Williams
**Artist:** Michael Dowling
**Publisher:** DC Vertigo
**Format:** Ongoing
★★★★½

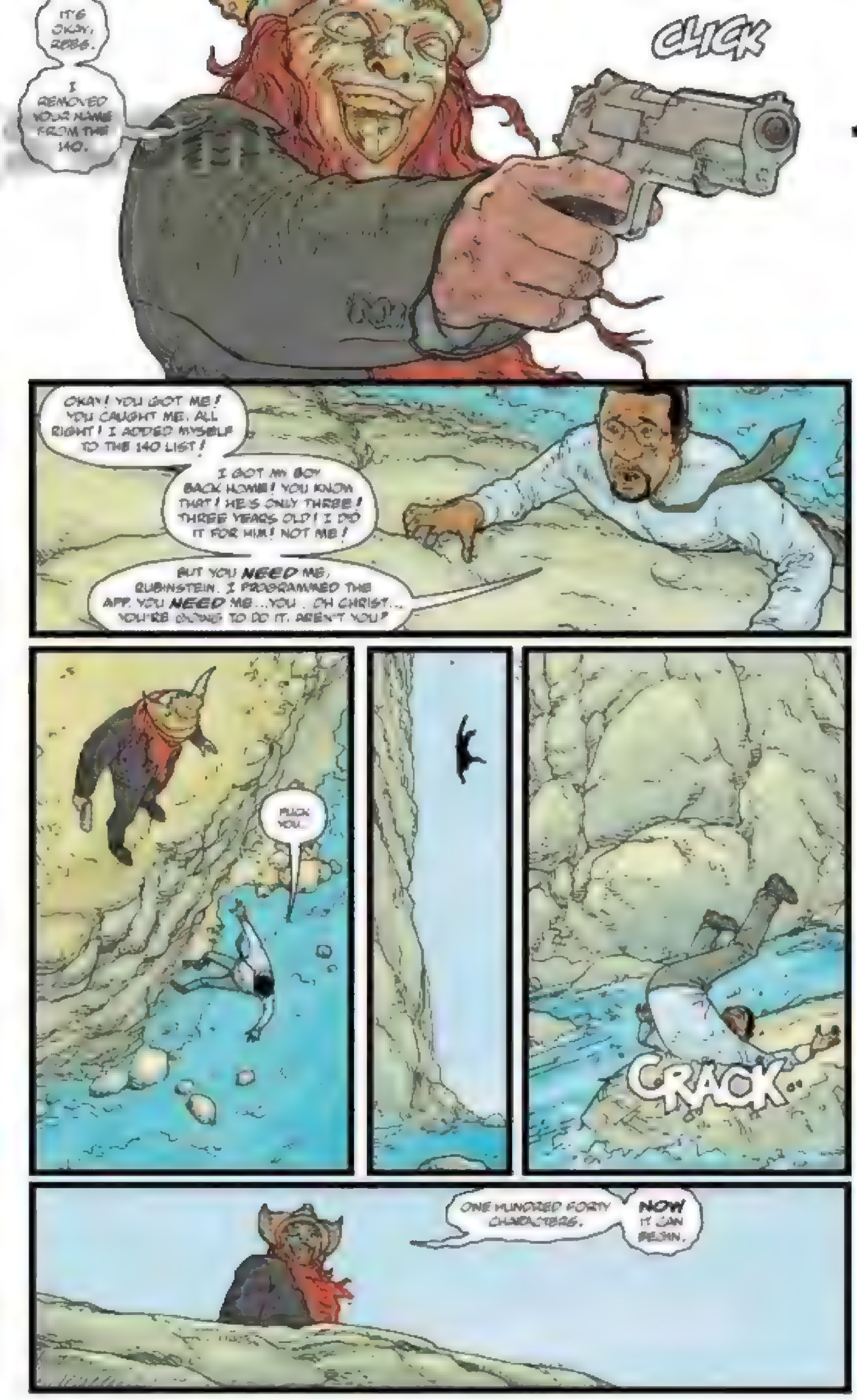
**Debuting this November, *Unfollow* is a social-media-themed thriller from *2000 AD* and *Martian Manhunter*'s Rob Williams, with art by *Death Sentence* co-creator Michael Dowling.**

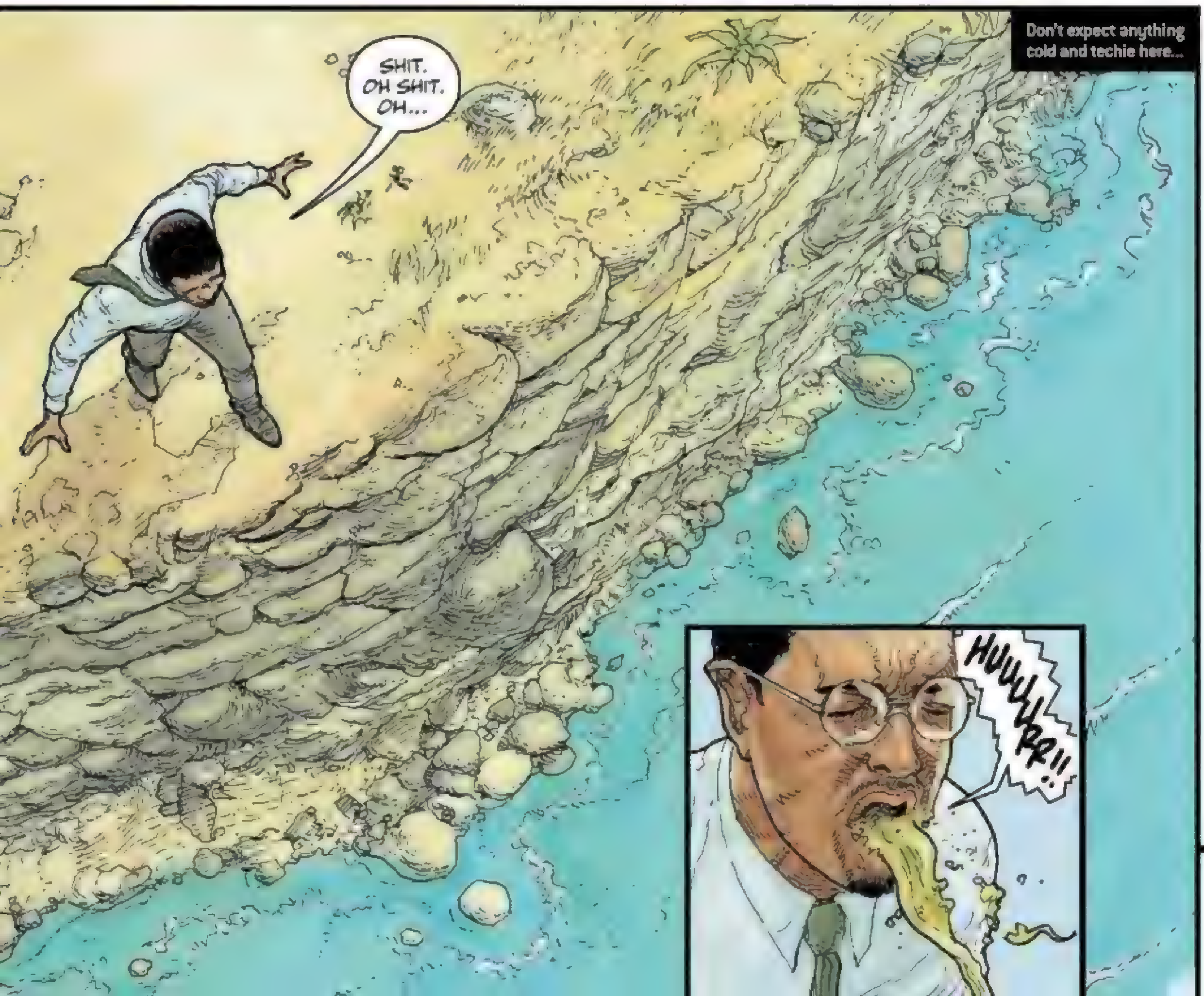
Williams sets out his stall early on. A man is hounded to his death by a sinister masked figure, while the backstory is delivered in the form of tweets. The mystery of who the killer is doesn't last long. We immediately discover that he's an agent working for Larry Ferrell – a terminally ill billionaire who has decided to donate his fortune to 140 individual people (or rather, *characters* – the joke only works that way). What should be a golden ticket begins to look an awful lot like a death sentence...

## Links in the food chain

This issue is, understandably, dedicated to introducing the cast of characters. David is a low-level gang member, ripping off a phone shop. He's quite the contrast to Courtney – the rebellious daughter of a Wall Street banker who donates her money to charity to spite her father, only to immediately win a brand-new fortune thanks to Ferrell's machinations. And there's Ravan, a journalist who has seen too much of the dark side of life and is, you suspect, about to see a lot more.

There are shades of *Battle Royale* here, as well as a few hints of weird sci-fi. The 140 are selected through an app, and there's a spectral panther that gives voice to Ferrell's apparently omniscient presence. Crucially, Williams – a self-confessed social media addict – doesn't hammer home a patronising message. Our online world is threaded through the story, utterly integral to it, but it's neither blithely praised nor glibly condemned.


IT'S OKAY, REBS.
I REMOVED YOUR NAME FROM THE 140.
CLICK
OKAY! YOU GOT ME! YOU CAUGHT ME. ALL RIGHT! I ADDED MYSELF TO THE 140 LIST!
I GOT MY BOY BACK HOME! YOU KNOW THAT! HE'S ONLY THREE! THREE YEARS OLD! I DID IT FOR HIM! NOT ME!
BUT YOU NEED ME, RUBINSTEIN. I PROGRAMMED THE APP. YOU NEED ME...YOU . OH CHRIST... YOU'RE GOING TO DO IT, AREN'T YOU?
FUCK YOU.
CRACK..
ONE HUNDRED FORTY CHARACTERS.
NOW IT CAN BEGIN.


SHIT. OH SHIT. OH...
HUUURR!!

Don't expect anything cold and techie here...

Dowling's art is crisp and detailed throughout, his panel composition giving this the feel of a high-end TV show. Indeed there's not a little of *Lost* in the way that the book's global mystery begins to unfold.

## Not friends, exactly

While Vertigo's remit has always been to explore the stranger side of comics, *Unfollow* feels like a step into the mainstream. That's not a criticism – if the line is to succeed, it needs to balance its stranger output with accessible projects like this. Smart and exciting, if less unique than *The Twilight Children*, it's the sort of instantly addictive book that could fill gap left by the likes of *Preacher*. That's a hit on the 'Like' button, then. **Will Salmon**

# Archie

**Reviewed:** Issues 1-2
**Writer:** Mark Waid
**Artist:** Fiona Staples
**Publisher:** Archie Comics
**Format:** Ongoing
★★★★☆

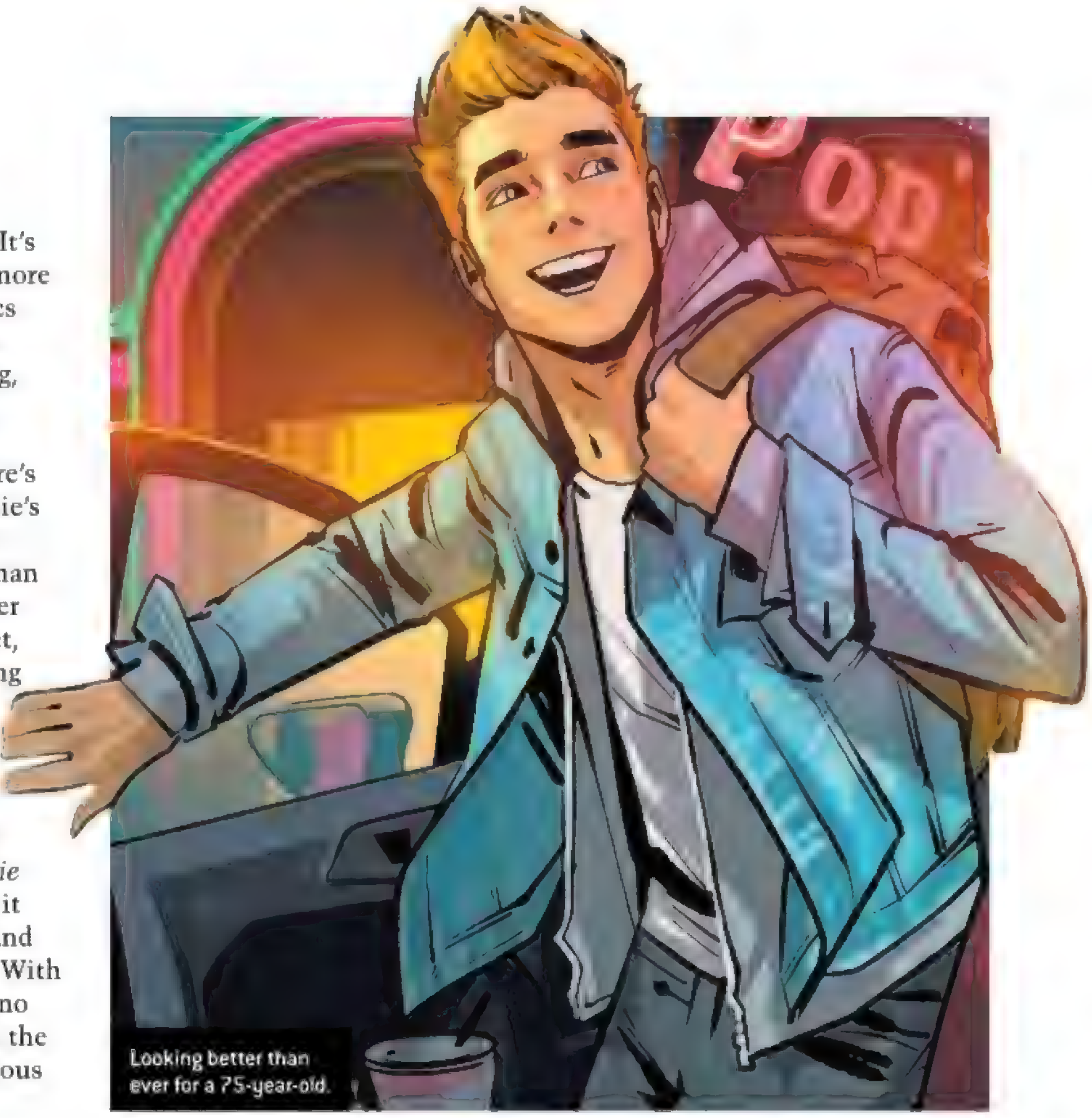
**You know Archie Andrews. You know his cheery demeanour, his cast of pals and his complicated love life. His comic was as American as apple pie and just as old-fashioned.**

Turns out, you know nothing and everything. This reboot proves two things: there is still life in the old characters, and the things that made them enduring were there from the beginning.

Welcome to Riverdale, as Arch himself says in the very first panel. Only this is Riverdale for the *Community* generation. It's witty, energetic, and rather more clued up on its gender politics than before. Thanks to some amusing fourth wall breaking, it's also not unlike a gentler, more chaste *Sex Criminals*.

The gang are all here. There's Betty, smartly recast as Archie's ex; ~~stoner~~ food-obsessed best pal Jughead, rather cannier than before; and a number of newer faces. There's no Veronica yet, but her arrival is already being set in motion.

Staples' art is as sharp and lively as Waid's script and things move along at a brisk pace. But the most impressive thing about *Archie* is how refreshingly unironic it is. It's wide-eyed and joyful and finds value in its characters. With characters this solid, there's no need for daft crossovers with the likes of the Punisher. A glorious reinvention. **Will Salmon**



Looking better than ever for a 75-year-old.

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# Wolf

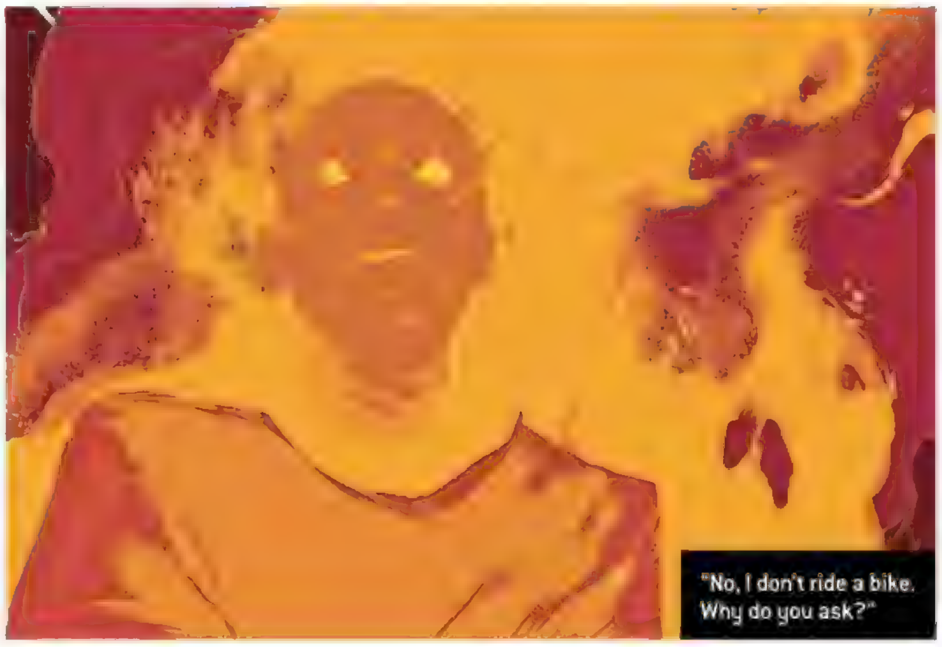
**Reviewed:** Issues 1-2
**Writer:** Ales Kot
**Artist:** Matt Taylor,
**Publisher:** Image
**Format:** Ongoing
★★★☆☆

**"I deal with ghouls, vampires, werewolves, succubi and wealthy militant racists."**

These are the words of Los Angeles based supernatural detective Antoine Wolfe, in this new ongoing series.

Wolfe is a "myth", a character with supernatural abilities. The opening pages show him having been set on fire by a gang boss – a prospective client who wants to verify that those claims of immortality are true. Our hero is deeply conflicted ("Immortality ain't my myth of choice," he says at one point), taking on dirty jobs as needs must, and at the end of the first issue finds himself babysitting the witness – or possibly perpetrator – of a bloody murder. A girl named, rather unsubtly, Anita Christ.

Despite the pointedness of that, the comic wears many of its unholy elements lightly. A Lovecraftian, tentacle-faced creature, for instance, turns out not to be a monster, so much as an old pal who's got a spot of landlord trouble.



"No, I don't ride a bike. Why do you ask?"

A decade ago, this fusion of genres would have seemed nicely iconoclastic, but in our *Walking Dead* and *True Blood*-stained landscape, it's less so. However, it's early days. Perhaps Ales Kot will find something new in his now familiar monster mashup set-up. Certainly the concept, revealed in issue 2, of a vampire forever stuck on the first day of a heavy menstrual cycle, is sufficiently disturbing and weirdly imaginative.

Artist Matt Taylor has a fluid style, which sometimes jars with his photo-referenced backdrops. Characters are distinct, albeit with an expressionless look around the eyes – apt enough for the morally bland LA tableaux in which they live.

To play into the imagery suggested by the title, *Wolf* has bite, but as yet, it doesn't quite have us howling at the moon. **James Lovegrove**

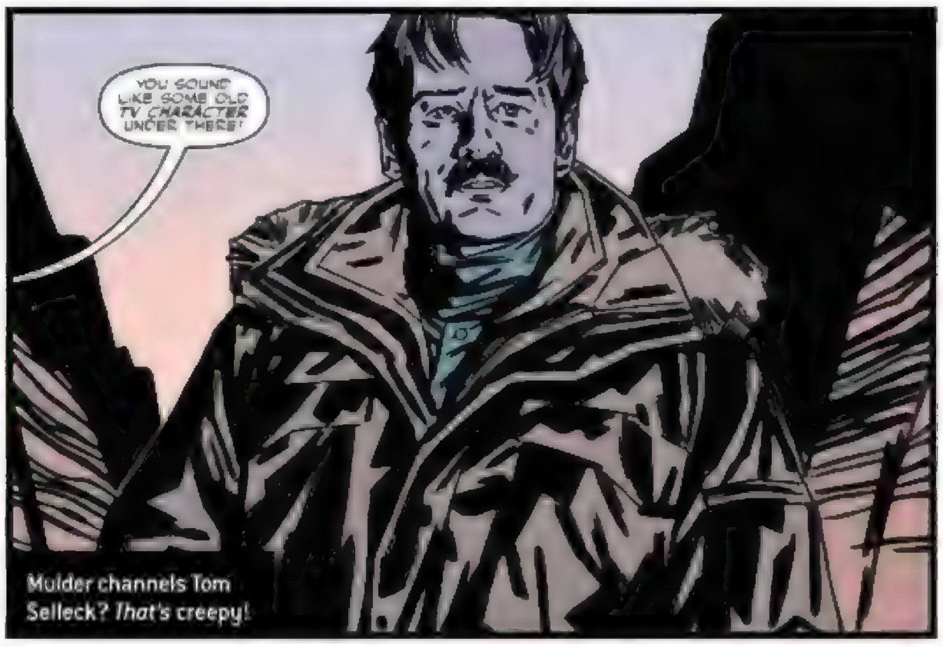
# **The X-Files:** Season 11

**Reviewed:** Issues 1-2
**Writer:** Joe Harris
**Artist:** Matthew Dow Smith
**Publisher:** IDW
**Format:** Ongoing
★★★½☆

**Mulder and Scully return for another round of paranormal investigations. But is an old face pulling their strings?**

Ever since Dark Horse found success with the Joss Whedon directed *Buffy Season 8* comics, other publishers have been reviving properties in the hopes of similar success. IDW's *The X-Files Season 10* proved to be one of the better examples, and now we're on to *Season 11*.

It helps that *X-Files* translates easily to comics. The flexibility of its anthology format means that a wide range of stories can be told, while the audience – by their very nature almost entirely hardened fans – will likely be receptive to the complicated arc plotting that eventually became the TV show's downfall.


YOU SOUND LIKE SOME OLD TV CHARACTER UNDER THERE!

Mulder channels Tom Selleck? *That's* creepy!

So, the new setup: Mulder and Scully are still an item and still hunting monsters. But there's a big difference this time. Gibson Praise, the annoying psychic kid from the TV show, has grown into a thoroughly dangerous and malevolent figure. He's forcing our favourite FBI agents to do his bidding and watching their every move. And part of his scheme seems to involve digging up and reviving old cases...

Hence issue 2, the first part of "Home Again" – a sequel to the infamously nasty Season 4 episode about incestuous cannibals. Harris does a good job of making this not seem like just a retread of old ground, leading to a thoroughly grim cliffhanger.

It's more effective than issue 1, which, like many of the TV show's arc episodes, feels rather aimless – though it does give us the weirdly horrifying sight of Mulder with a moustache and an excellent putdown from Frohike.

Dow Smith's art is shadowy and atmospheric. Likenesses are good, though some may be put off by the heaviness of the linework. It feels almost like a deliberate nod to the franchise's original, Charlie Adlard drawn incarnation. **Will Salmon**

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# Island

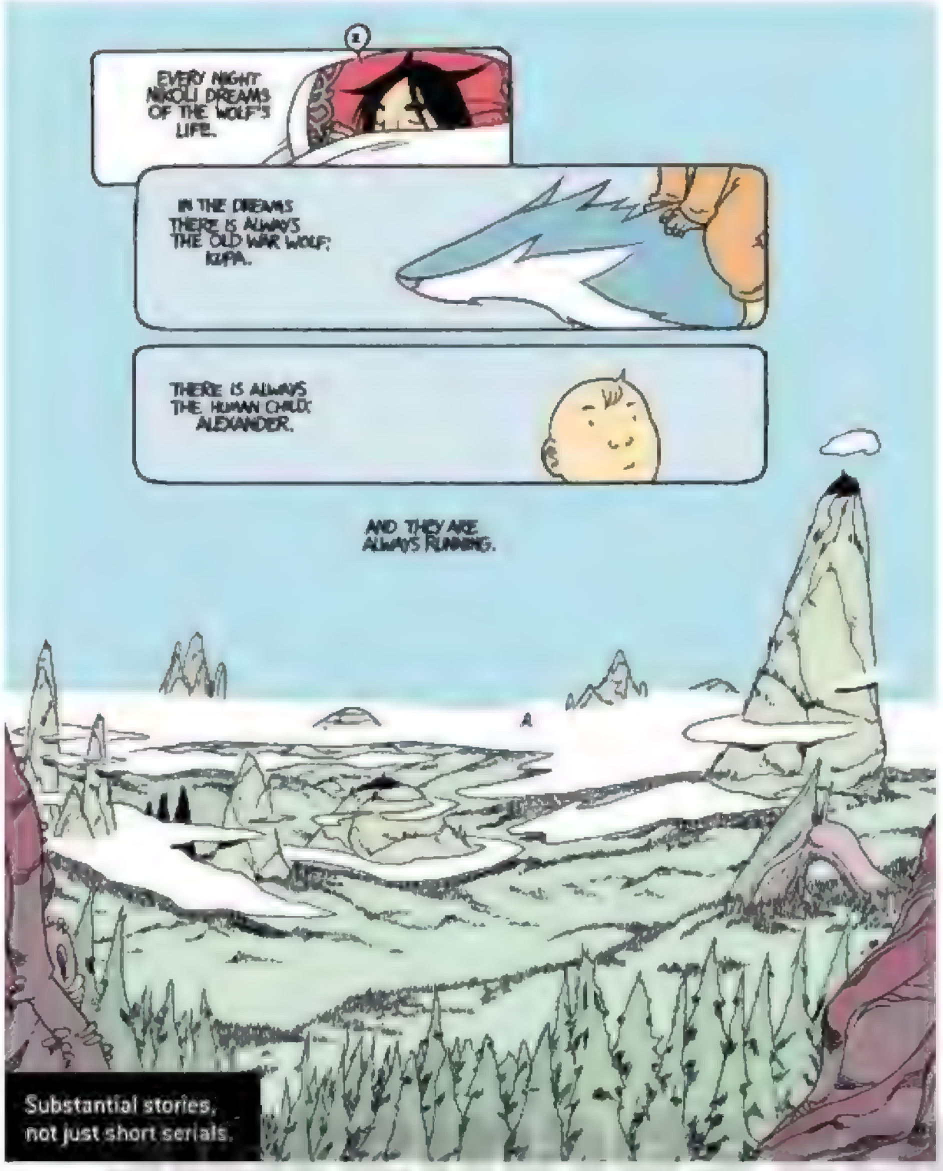
**Reviewed:** Issues 1-2
**Writer:** Various
**Artist:** Various
**Publisher:** Image
**Format:** Anthology
★★★★★

**This new anthology, edited by Brandon Graham and Emma Ríos, is a beautiful, unpolished gem with bold art and a heady mix of heartfelt, funny and sometimes jarring stories.**

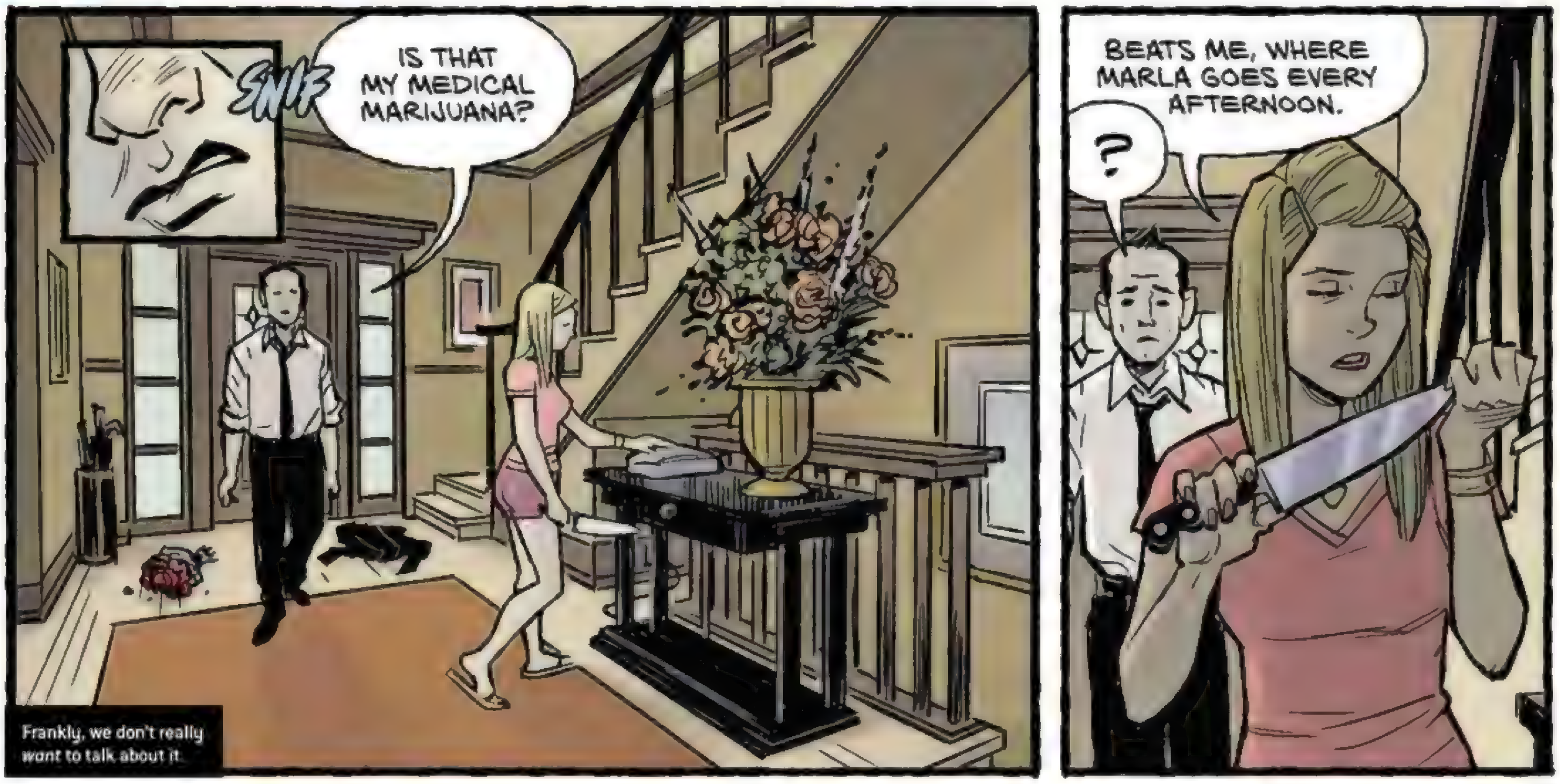
It's a cross-platform collection, which adds to the DIY, fanzine feel and provides some truly breathtaking art. Will Kirby's detail-packed work provides the cover and first five pages for the second issue, and you could sit and reread those early frames over and over, noticing something different each time.

Emma Rios' story is another standout, an engrossing tale that looks at gender identity and body dysmorphia in a very scientific way. Her artwork is beautifully expressive, and the muted colour palette means the focus is kept tightly on the three core characters and their individual journeys. Following the conclusion, there's even an article on the theory of whether – and if so, how – brain transplants could ever be a reality.

That illustrates exactly what's great about *Island*: there's stuff here that's informative, fun and really thought-provoking at the same time. No matter what your taste, there will be something here that you'll enjoy. Because all the artists and writers have such markedly different styles, nothing ever feels samey or repetitive. An impressive debut. **Sara Westrop**


EVERY NIGHT NIKOLI DREAMS OF THE WOLF'S LIFE.
IN THE DREAMS THERE IS ALWAYS THE OLD WAR WOLF: KIPA.
THERE IS ALWAYS THE HUMAN CHILD: ALEXANDER.
AND THEY ARE ALWAYS RUNNING.

Substantial stories, not just short serials.


SNIF
IS THAT MY MEDICAL MARIJUANA?
BEATS ME, WHERE MARLA GOES EVERY AFTERNOON.
?

Frankly, we don't really *want* to talk about it.

# Fight Club 2

**Reviewed:** Issues 1-5
**Writer:** Chuck Palahniuk
**Artist:** Cameron Stewart
**Publisher:** Dark Horse
**Format:** 10-part series
★★★★☆

FIGHT CLUB 2
2

**It's always risky going back to a hit. Chuck Palahniuk made his name with his slim, sick debut novel about underground fighting, soap and anti-capitalism before going on to refine his style in numerous other darkly funny satires.**

David Fincher's movie adaptation proved to be, if not a massive commercial hit, then a cult success. It undoubtedly helped Palahniuk's career (and he has been nothing but complimentary about the film), but perhaps took the book away from him a little.

## By the book

Hence this official sequel to the novel and *not* the film. It's ten years later and Project Mayhem has singularly failed to bring about the end of society as we know it – though it's still out there and the disciples of Tyler Durden continue to meet at the house on Paper Street.

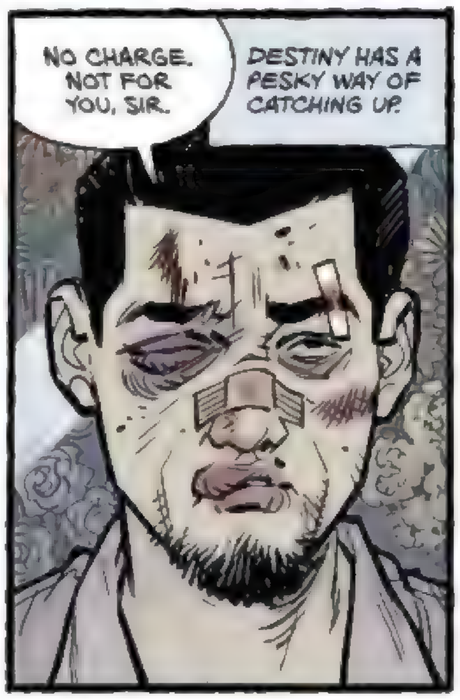
Tyler, for his part, is suppressed in the mind of our nameless protagonist – now going by Sebastian. He's settled down with Marla. They have a kid and appear to be fully assimilated into a life of suburban domesticity. Bored out of her mind, Marla starts tampering with Sebastian's meds so that she can have an affair with Tyler. It's not long, however, before he gets loose and kidnaps their son.

*Fight Club 2* walks a fine line between the old and new. Returning elements – "space monkeys", Angel Face, Marla's addiction to support groups – are all present and correct, but there are stranger developments as Palahniuk begins to experiment with the comic form. Just as Fincher would have Tyler talk to camera, so Palahniuk plays with the fabric of his comic's reality. At one point Marla runs into Chuck himself at a 'Write Club'...

Tyler, meanwhile, is a more aggressive and malevolent force. Before, he would threaten people, seemingly to force them into improving their lot in life. Now he's openly a tyrant, ordering executions at will. It's a less nuanced take on the character, perhaps, but one that suits the story well.

The book evokes the diseased tone of the original. The jokes are as black as they come (at one point Marla joins a support group for terminally ill children). And it retains the sense you get from the book that this is a story that could go *anywhere*.

Stewart's grubby, sketchy art is appropriately dingy, neither following the film (Tyler is a stocky surfer type here) or shying so far away as to make the two incompatible. And as the story progresses it becomes visually more adventurous, with images of Sebastian's medication littering the page, occasionally obscuring faces and dialogue.


NO CHARGE. NOT FOR YOU, SIR.
DESTINY HAS A PESKY WAY OF CATCHING UP.

> "IT RETAINS THE SENSE THAT THIS STORY COULD GO ANYWHERE"

## Something to say

Does *Fight Club 2* need to exist? For the first couple of issues, the jury is out – it's an entertaining but slow start. And then #4 hits and the story bends in some fascinating new directions. It's an eccentric and funny book, and a supremely assured comics debut. We'd love to see Palahniuk write more in the medium. **Will Salmon**

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# Captain America: White

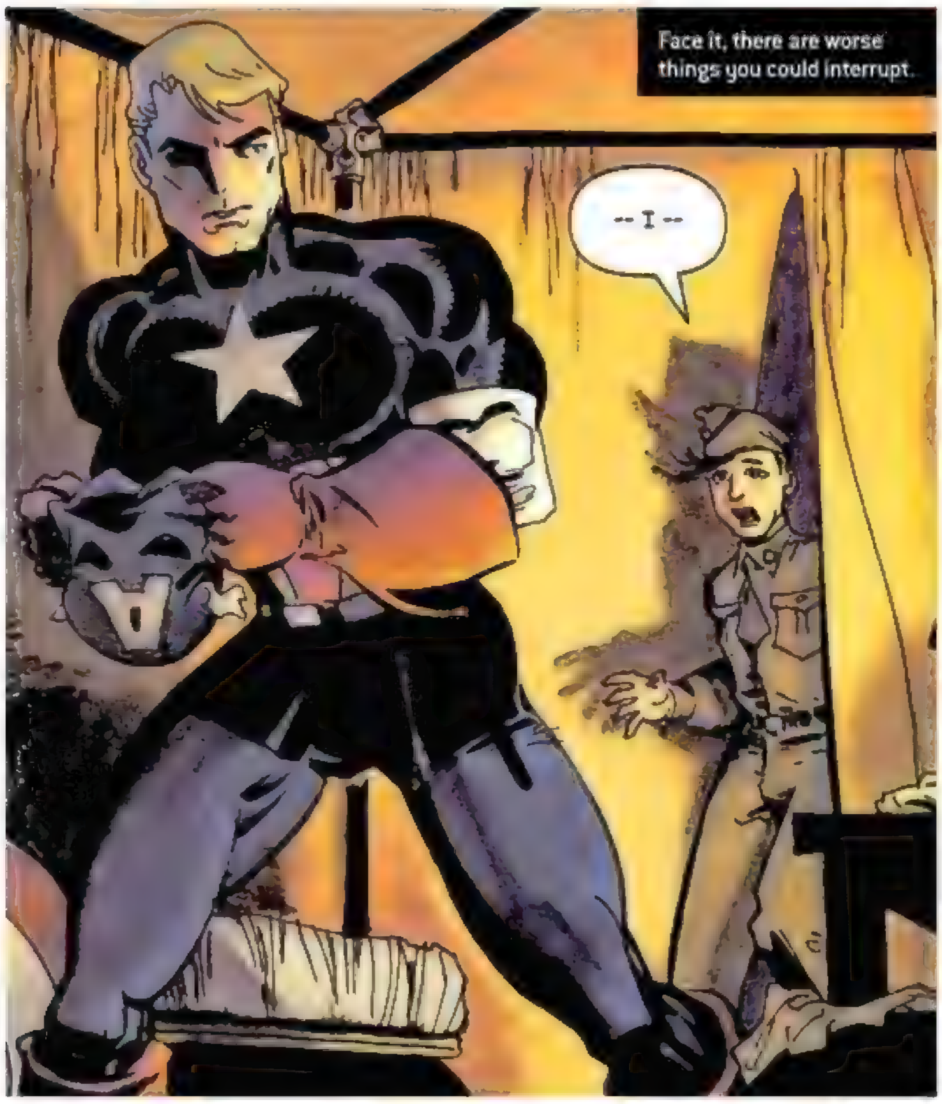
Reviewed: Issue 1
Writer: Jeph Loeb
Artist: Tim Sale
Publisher: Marvel
Format: 5-part series
★★★★☆

**This is the latest in Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale's colour-themed reimaginings of the early days of Marvel's greats, after *Daredevil: Yellow*, *Spider-Man: Blue* and *Hulk: Gray*.**

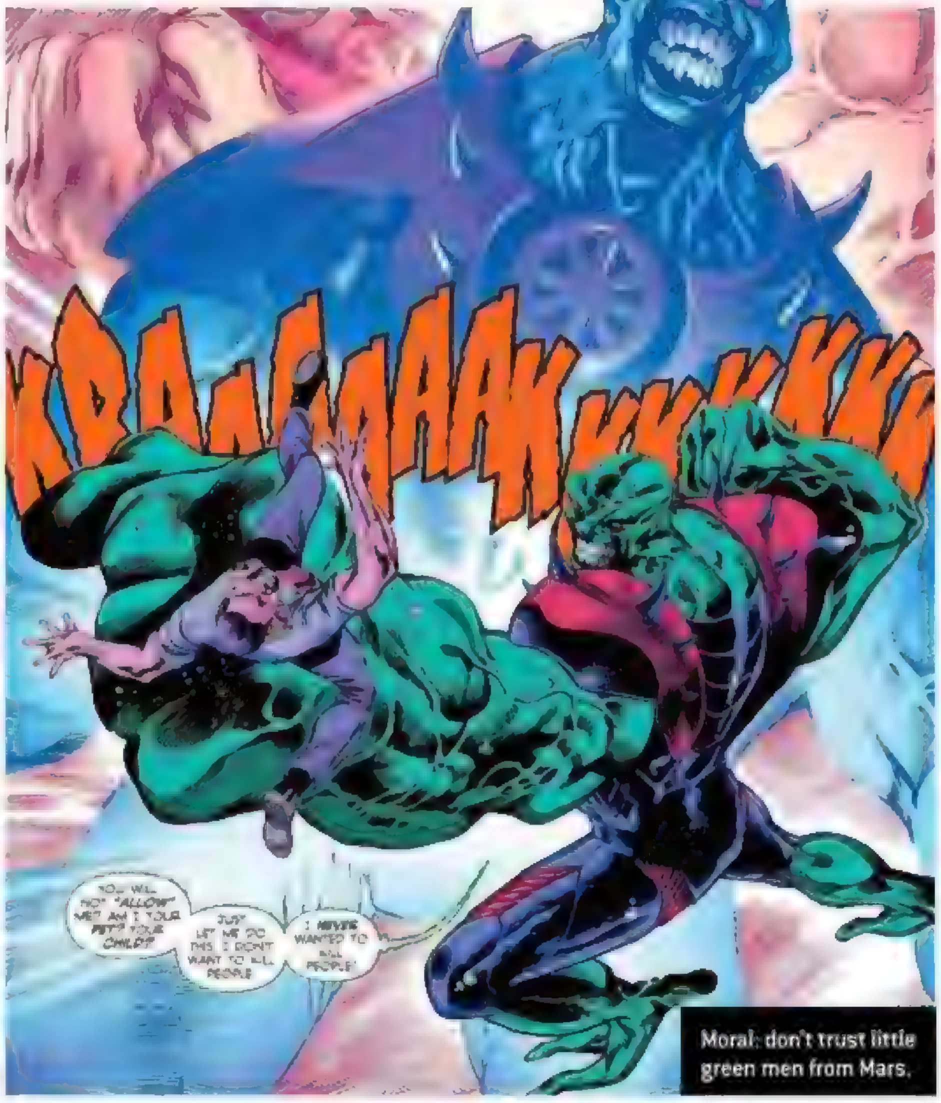
As before, the duo use scenes and dialogue from the original comics and fill gaps in familiar storylines to tell broader, more nuanced tales than the creators back then were able or inclined to. It's like a cover version of a classic song with added trills, frills and orchestration.

The first issue recaps Cap's awakening from suspended animation and first clash with the Avengers, follows with a poignant interlude featuring Nick Fury, then flashes back to WWII with Cap, Bucky, Fury and the Howlers on a dangerous mission in the Mediterranean.

Minor niggles: Loeb's tendency to stretch the flow of captions across far too many panels with long gaps in between, and Sale's occasionally too loose drawing, particularly anatomy. Overall, though, this team mesh so well, you know they'll always deliver a classy product. **James Lovegrove**



Face it, there are worse things you could interrupt.


KRAAAGAAAKKKKKK
YOU WILL NOT "ALLOW" ME? AM I YOUR PET? YOUR CHILD?
JUST LET ME DO THIS. I DON'T WANT TO KILL PEOPLE
I NEVER WANTED TO KILL PEOPLE!

Moral: don't trust little green men from Mars.

# Martian Manhunter

Reviewed: Issues 1-3
Writer: Rob Williams
Artist: Eddy Barrows
Publisher: DC
Format: Ongoing
★★★★★

**The New 52 is dead... Long live the DC YOU?** In June, DC started a major restructuring, with 24 new titles in place of a bunch of cancellations. One of the most exciting additions to the DC YOUniverse (seriously, that'll never catch on) is a solo book for everyone's favourite alien shapeshifter, Martian Manhunter. Ditched from Justice League during the New 52 years and relegated to the background, J'onn J'onzz returns just in time to save the world from a sleeper-cell of Martian terrorists.

But with J'onn also going through a significant identity crisis following his personality being split into several bodies, can he pull himself together enough to rescue humanity?

It's a brilliant concept, in a surprisingly challenging book. Williams's intense words and Barrow's beautiful horror-tinged art combine to create a comic that feels more like Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* than a generic JLA book. Williams treats J'onn as though he's aware of how extraneous he's been to DC in recent years, this book almost feeling like a therapy session at times. But, you know, in a fun and exciting way.

Deeply creepy, with some rule-breaking artwork, *Manhunter* takes dedication but is worth the initial effort. Oh, and expect to see enigmatic support-character Mr Biscuits in everyone's end-of-year lists. **Sam Ashurst**

# Black Canary

**Reviewed:** Issues 1-4
**Writer:** Brenden Fletcher
**Artist:** Annie Wu
**Publisher:** DC
**Format:** Ongoing
★★★★☆

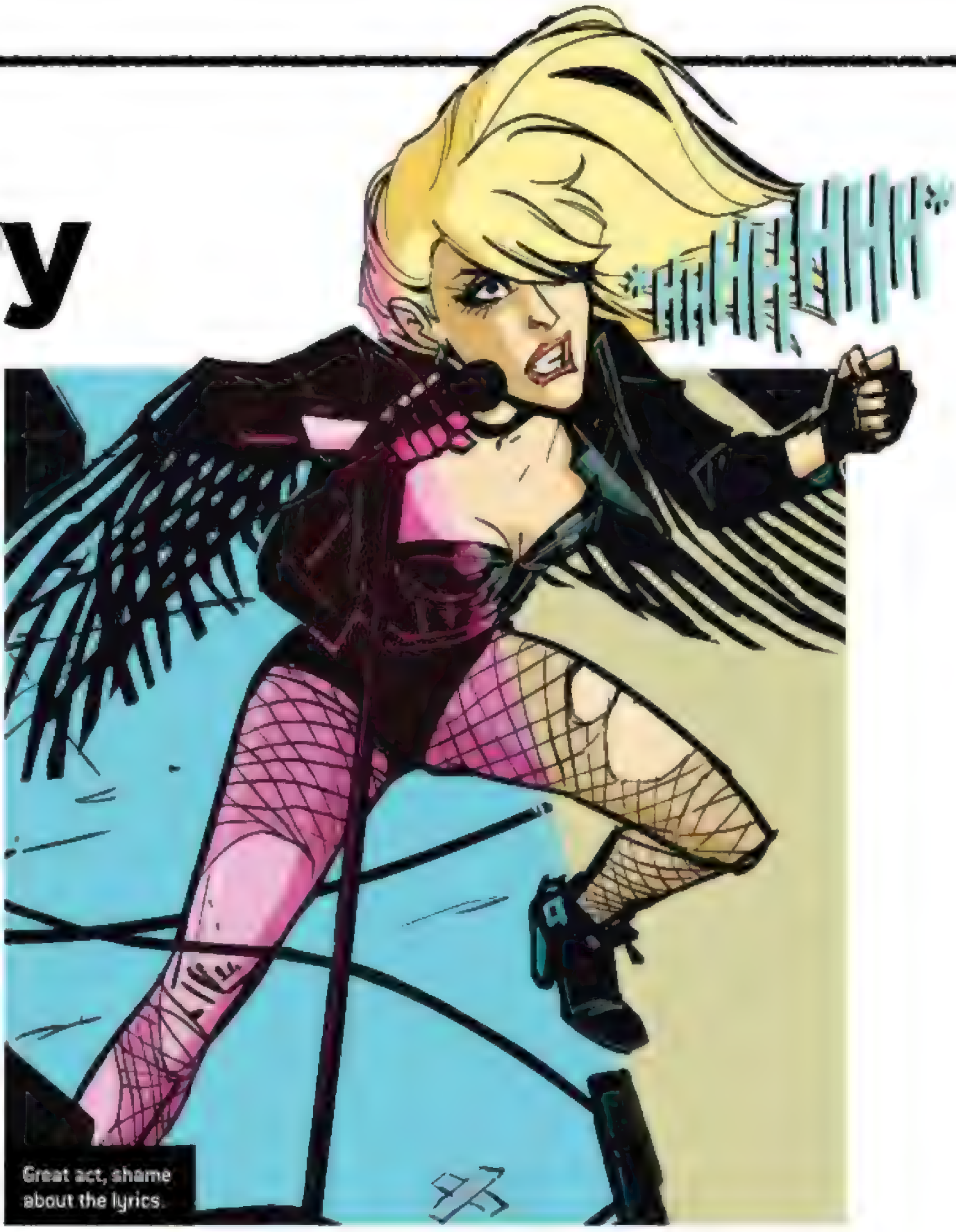
**DC's main-book big guns are fighting serious battles at the moment. Batman's lost his memory, Superman's lost his powers...** Meanwhile, Black Canary just wants to survive a tour with her band – a high concept that somehow manages to be just as compelling as the rest of her buddies' adventures.

But forget the premise, this is all about Annie Wu's art. Her punk-rock-fanzine-style visuals perfectly match the tone of Fletcher's rock 'n' roll rebirth, bathing the book in a neon glow.

Canary has struggled to find her place in the modern DC universe. But shrugging off her responsibilities to play a bunch of dive-bars seems to be the best possible solution. Looking like a cross between Alice Glass and Karen O, Dinah Lance has stepped out of the shadows and into the spotlight – while still finding time to kick bad-guy butt along the way, of course.

Despite the unexpected career-change, long-term fans will recognise Dinah. Fletcher's done an impressive job of retaining the core of the character whilst letting her evolve enough to take centre-stage of her own story.

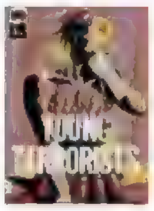
DC is experimenting here, and *Black Canary* feels like an Image book – think *The Wicked + The Divine* meets *Velvet*. Let's hope *Canary* finds an audience to match, as this comic deserves to sell out stadiums. **Sam Ashurst**



Great act, shame about the lyrics.

# Young Terrorists

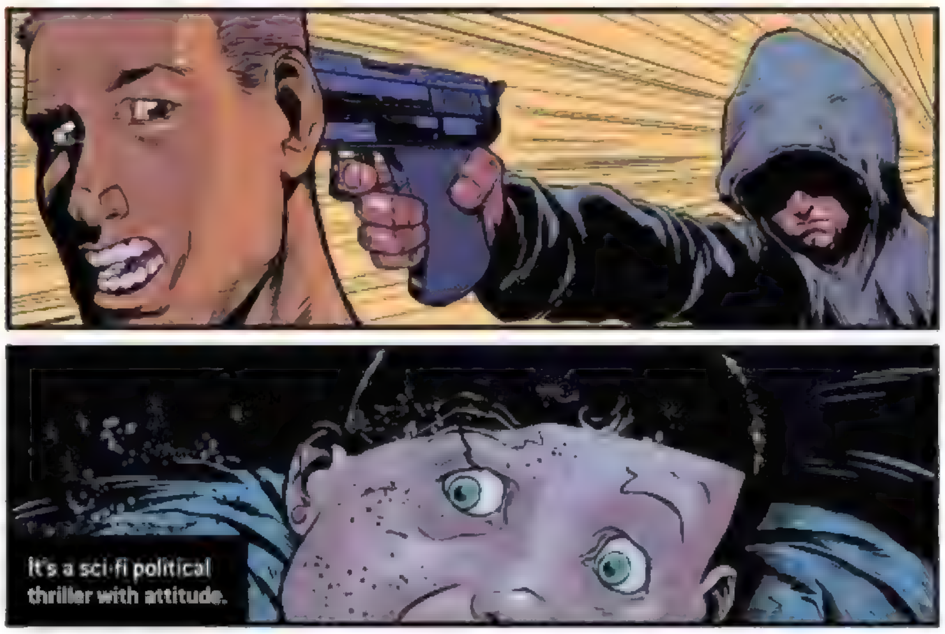
**Reviewed:** Issue 1
**Writer:** Matt Pizzolo
**Artist:** Amancay Nahuelpan
**Publisher:** Black Mask
**Format:** Ongoing
★★★★½



**The much-hyped new series from young upstart publisher Black Mask lives up to its edgy reputation.** *Young Terrorists* sets out its stall as a provocative comic right from the outset. The cover shows a dreadlocked girl with dynamite strapped to her body, about to light the fuse with a Zippo. In the opening pages, a baby is kidnapped at gunpoint. Fifteen years later, a billionaire, Gregor Solomon, is blown up in a coffee bar with a briefcase bomb. His daughter Sera is arrested on terrorism charges and sent to a black-ops military prison in the desert where she is tortured and forced to fight other detainees in brutal death matches, until she escapes.

Then we meet a young animal rights activist on the run, who comes to be known as Cesar. He's beaten up by truckers, arrested by the police, and rescued by an enigmatic man in a hoodie.

Cesar's and Sera's storylines intersect in Detroit as she recruits him to her cause: no less than the overthrow of the "transnational mega-elites", corrupt architects of the New World Order, amongst whose number her father was counted. Well, you can't blame her.



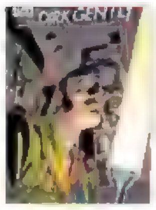
It's a sci-fi political thriller with attitude.

This 80-page debut issue, described by the back-cover blurb as a "graphic novella", reads very much as though it is three normal-sized issues packaged as one, and it forms an excellent introduction to what looks like becoming an ace new ongoing series.

There are shades of *DMZ* in Matt Pizzolo's script, particularly Sera's sovereign-state-within-a-city that provides a self-sufficient refuge for people who want to get off the grid and smash the system, while Amancay Nahuelpan's rough-edged artwork oozes anarchism, adrenaline and paranoia like blood from a knife wound.
**James Lovegrove**

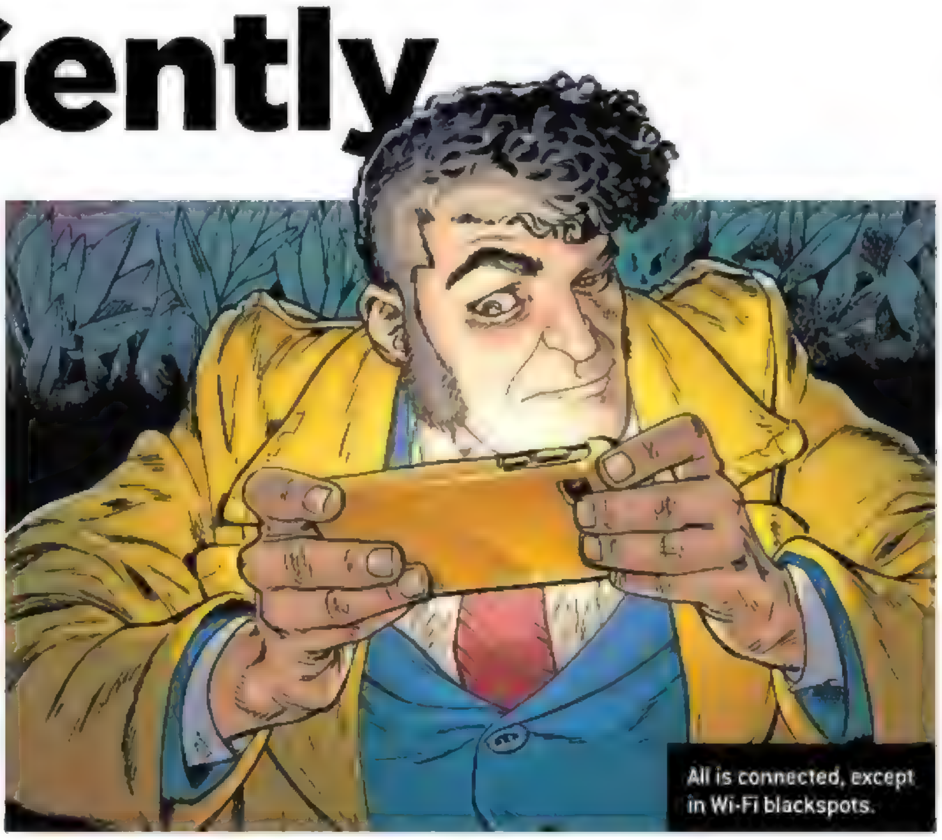
# Dirk Gently

**Reviewed:** Issues 1-3
**Writer:** Chris Ryall
**Artist:** Tony Atkins
**Publisher:** IDW
**Format:** Ongoing
★★★★☆



**Douglas Adams's second best known creation gets a comics adaptation, and writer Chris Ryall does a very good approximation of the late author's writing style, complete with freewheeling plotting and daft non-sequitur dialogue.**

Dirk Gently, for those still uninitiated, is a detective who believes in "the fundamental interconnectedness of all things" and solves mysteries by following random causal links between events. This may look like making it up as he goes along to the casual observer, but somehow he always reaches the right conclusions in the end.



All is connected, except in Wi-Fi blackspots.

The comic's initial five-issue arc, "The Interconnectedness of All Kings", opens with Dirk fleeing to San Diego after some unspecified catastrophe in his native England. Stealing luggage belonging to a WASPish couple who also happen to be serial killers, he chances upon a detection-themed teahouse.

All this is tied in with a pair of revived Ancient Egyptian mummies who are sucking the lifeforce out of others to survive, and with Mr Bird, an immortal who's distributing peculiar golden cellphones amongst the homeless population.

In addition there's room for supporting roles for two characters from the original novels, time-travelling academic Professor Urban "Reg" Chronotis and journalist Kate Schechter.

Tony Akins, perhaps best known for his work on *Fables*, illustrates the series very ably. His tight, humorous style brings to mind Steve Parkhouse, and his Dirk bears a more than passing resemblance to David Tennant's Tenth Doctor – perhaps a nod to the fact that Adams drew on elements from a couple of his own *Who* scripts as the basis for the books (Chronotis, for example, began life in the aborted "Shada" serial). In all, it's good, breezy fun for newbies and the Adams faithful. **James Lovegrove**

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# Beauty

**Reviewed:** Issues 1-2
**Writer:** Jeremy Haun and Jason A Hurley
**Artist:** Jeremy Haun
**Publisher:** Image
**Format:** Ongoing
★★★☆☆

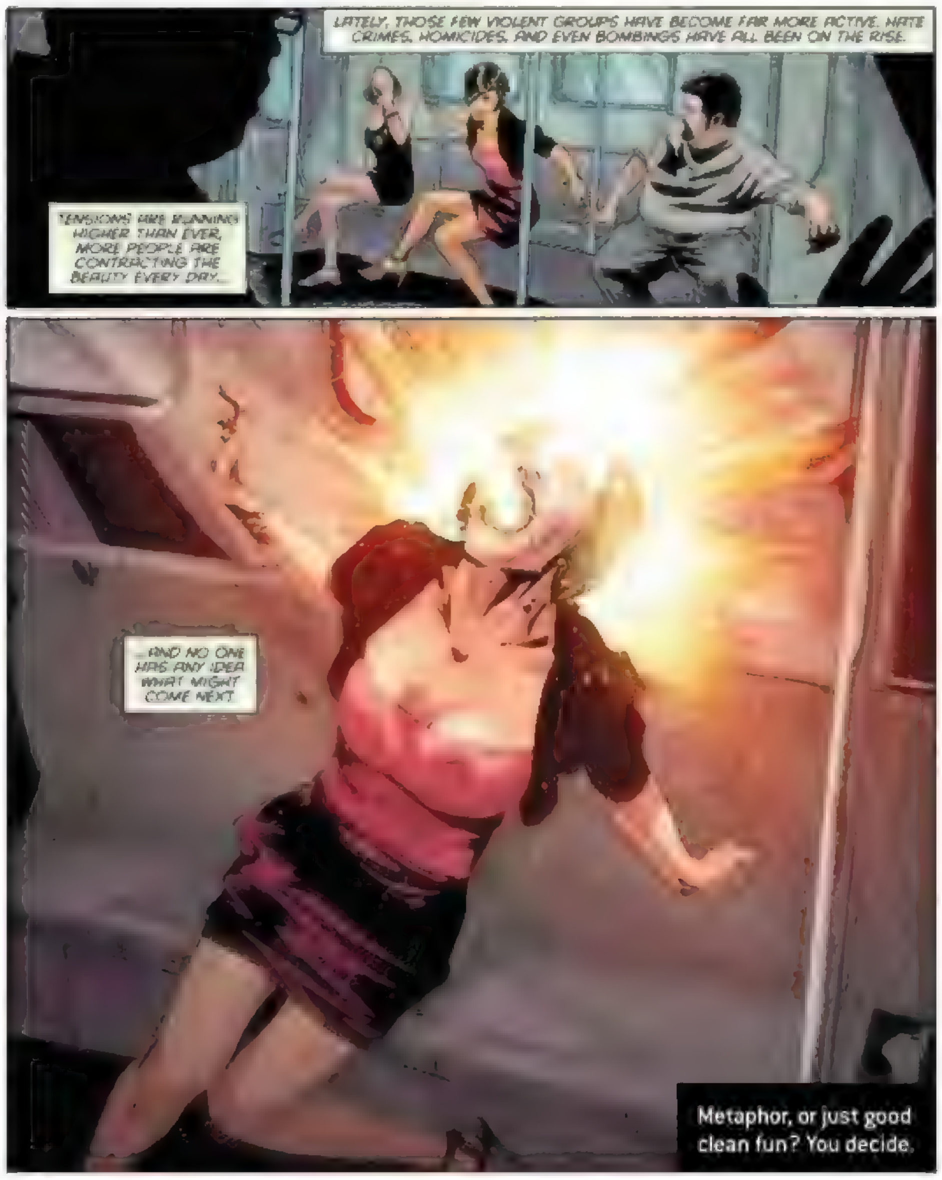
***Beauty* comes with an irresistible hook. There's a new STD. But rather than leading to warts, sores, itching and embarrassment, it has a desirable side effect: it makes you *gorgeous*.**

We learn all this from a rather clunky and exposition-heavy opening few pages, which lay out the status quo. Half the world have "the Beauty" and the other half hate their perfectly formed arses. The story follows a squad of investigators after a supposedly Beauty-related bombing has wiped out a subway car full of people. But why is this crime of so much interest to the hazmat-suited CDC agents who appear out of nowhere and take over?

*Beauty* has been incubating for a few years now, after making its debut in Top Cow's pilot season contest in 2012. It's an arresting idea, even if the execution isn't quite there yet. The central mystery is intriguing enough without needing to throw in a slightly comical rooftop chase straight out of 1940s pulp serial.

Jeremy Haun's art is suitably dark and grimy, while John Rauch colours it all in grungey shades of Matrix green. It looks good enough, but adds to the slightly dated look and feel.

But it would be wrong to be harsh about *Beauty* yet. There are good ideas here and the book is still finding its feet. Certainly its appeal is more than just skin deep. **Will Salmon**


LATELY, THOSE FEW VIOLENT GROUPS HAVE BECOME FAR MORE ACTIVE. HATE CRIMES, HOMICIDES, AND EVEN BOMBINGS HAVE ALL BEEN ON THE RISE.
TENSIONS ARE RUNNING HIGHER THAN EVER, MORE PEOPLE ARE CONTRACTING THE BEAUTY EVERY DAY...
...AND NO ONE HAS ANY IDEA WHAT MIGHT COME NEXT

Metaphor, or just good clean fun? You decide.

# Star Wars
# Shattered Empire

**Reviewed:** Issue 1
**Writer:** Greg Rucka
**Artist:** Marco Checchetto
**Publisher:** Marvel
**Format:** 4-issue miniseries
★★★★☆

**The bridge between the original trilogy and Disney's sequel *Star Wars* saga is finally here, and it's looking rather good...**

For a big chunk of the comics buying public – not to mention Marvel itself – *Journey To The Force Awakens: Shattered Empire* (to give it its full, ungainly title) is the big one: the year's most anticipated comic. The *Star Wars* spinoff empire (ho ho ho) is already going great guns, but this is the first issue of an event book that will join the dots between *Return Of The Jedi* and *The Force Awakens*. You don't have to be a Sith or a Jedi to see that this is going to be huge.

We start on the Death Star, in the final moments of battle, and a gorgeous, appropriately cinematic spread by Checchetto. Things play out as they should – the superweapon is destroyed, Luke escapes and everyone parties on Endor like it's 1983. But our main focus this issue isn't the main characters: it's with A-Wing pilot Shara Bey and her lover, one Sergeant Kes Dameron.

It's the day after the night before and, after a brief tryst, the two embark on a mop-up mission to take down a secret Imperial outpost on Endor. What it is that they find there is, frustratingly, saved for #2 (unavailable at the time of going to press).

## Secret origins...

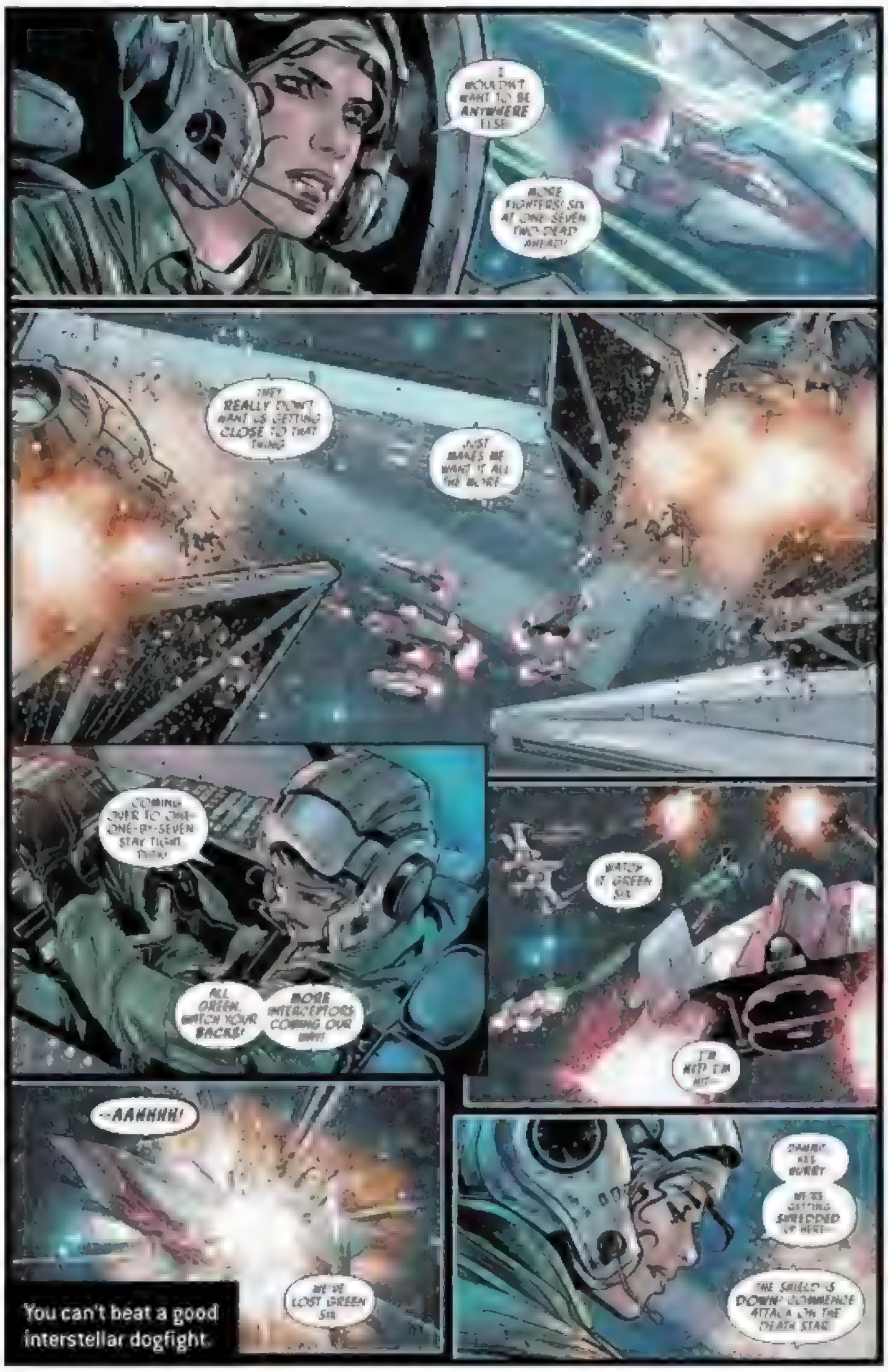
The most interesting thing about this comic is that its scenes of military action with soldiers, walkers and not a Jedi in sight (a brief cameo by Luke aside), it feels rather like next year's *Rogue One* movie, rather than *The Force Awakens* or *Return Of The Jedi*.

It's an assured and entertaining debut issue, if a little light on plot. Its main pull is the identity of Bey's lover and the question over whether he will survive – something that Rucka plays with amusingly by pointing out how ominous it is when someone says "I love you" before setting off on a dangerous mission. If everything plays into dramatic conventions then the brief, implied sex scene we witness will be the moment that Poe Dameron, Oscar Isaac's character in *The Force Awakens*, is conceived. Fine, but it's not the strongest of hooks.

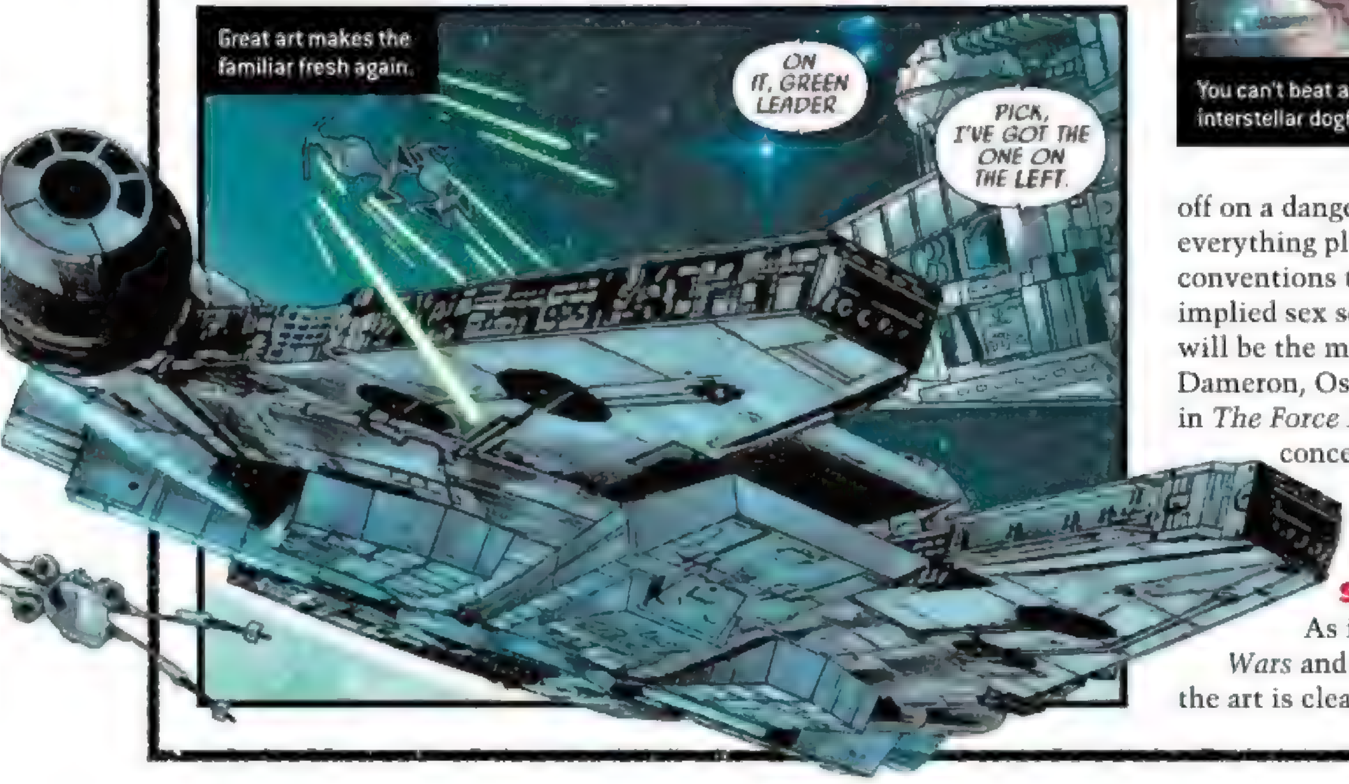
## Solid start

As in the main *Star Wars* and *Darth Vader* titles, the art is clean and kinetic. There's a furious intensity to the opening battles. Checchetto even manages to make the Ewoks look fierce as they take on some typically useless Stormtroopers.

There's nothing wildly new here yet, but this is a strong opening chapter. The success of the series will depend on whether Rucka and Checchetto can make this wartime romance believable in the space of just four issues, and whether we get a greater sense of the bigger galactic picture. **Will Salmon**


I WOULDN'T WANT TO BE ANYWHERE ELSE.
MORE FIGHTERS! SIX AT ONE-SEVEN TWO-DEAD AHEAD!
THEY REALLY DON'T WANT US GETTING CLOSE TO THAT THING.
JUST MAKES ME WANT IT ALL THE MORE.
COMING OVER TO ONE-ONE-BY-SEVEN STAY TIGHT
ALL GREEN, WATCH YOUR BACKS!
MORE INTERCEPTORS COMING OUR WAY!
WATCH IT, GREEN SIX
I'M HIT! I'M HIT--
--AAHHHH!
WE'VE LOST GREEN SIX
WE'RE GETTING SHREDDED UP HERE--
THE SHIELD'S DOWN! COMMENCE ATTACK ON THE DEATH STAR

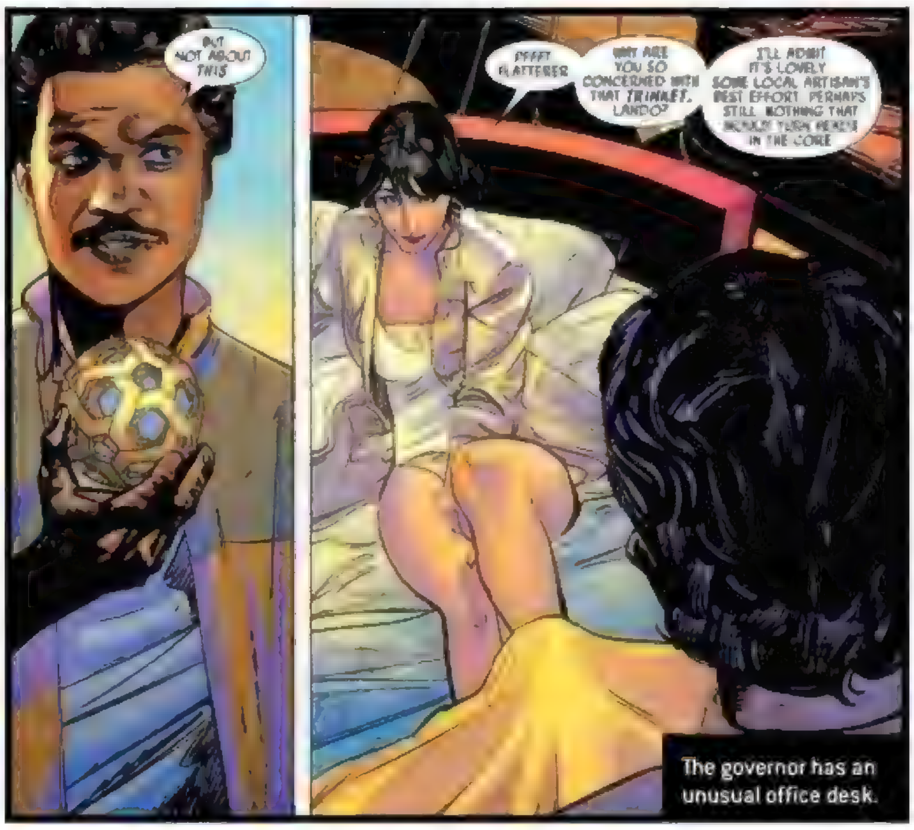
You can't beat a good interstellar dogfight.


ON IT, GREEN LEADER
PICK, I'VE GOT THE ONE ON THE LEFT.

Great art makes the familiar fresh again.

Storemags

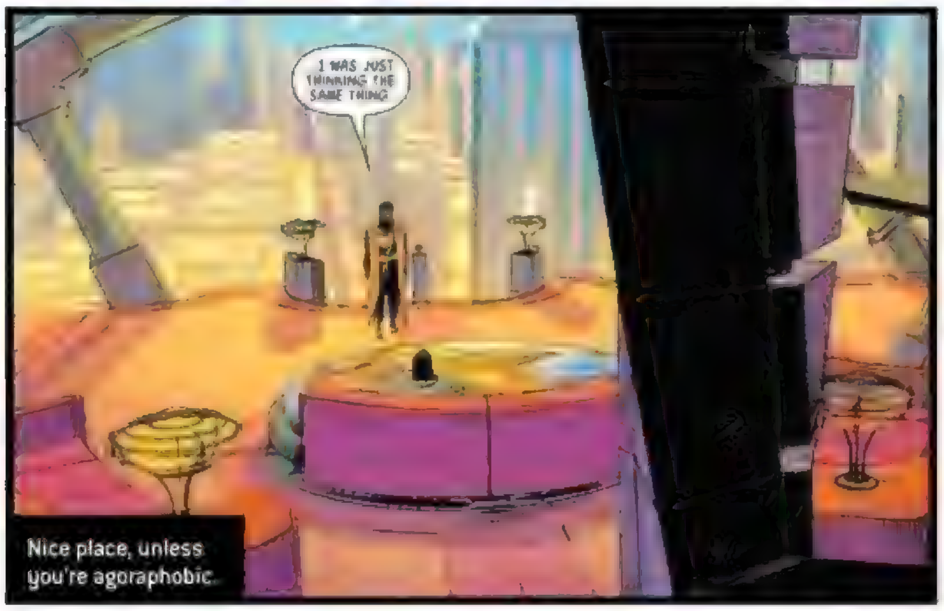
# Star Wars Lando


BUT NOT ABOUT THIS
PFFFT FLATTERER
WHY ARE YOU SO CONCERNED WITH THAT TRINKET, LANDO?
I'LL ADMIT IT'S LOVELY SOME LOCAL ARTISAN'S BEST EFFORT PERHAPS STILL NOTHING THAT WOULD TURN HEADS IN THE CORE

The governor has an unusual office desk.

**Reviewed:** Issues 1-4
**Writer:** Charles Soule
**Artist:** Alex Maleev
**Publisher:** Marvel
**Format:** 5-issue miniseries
★★★★☆

**This could easily have been the weak link in Marvel's ever-expanding *Star Wars* line.** A five-issue miniseries about the lothario gambler and businessman, set before his original introduction in *The Empire Strikes Back*? Sure, we've always known he has a chequered past, but against the high-stakes action and intrigue of the regular *Star Wars*, *Darth Vader* and *Princess Leia* books, it risked seeming small fry.


I WAS JUST THINKING THE SAME THING

Nice place, unless you're agoraphobic.

We were wrong about that. Lando and Lobot (you know, his bald cyborg pal from *Empire*) take on "one last job..." in an attempt to square their debts with an alien gangster. The mission involves stealing a starship from an apparently unmanned Imperial outpost. It's all going smoothly until they discover that the ship is the prized possession of the Emperor himself...

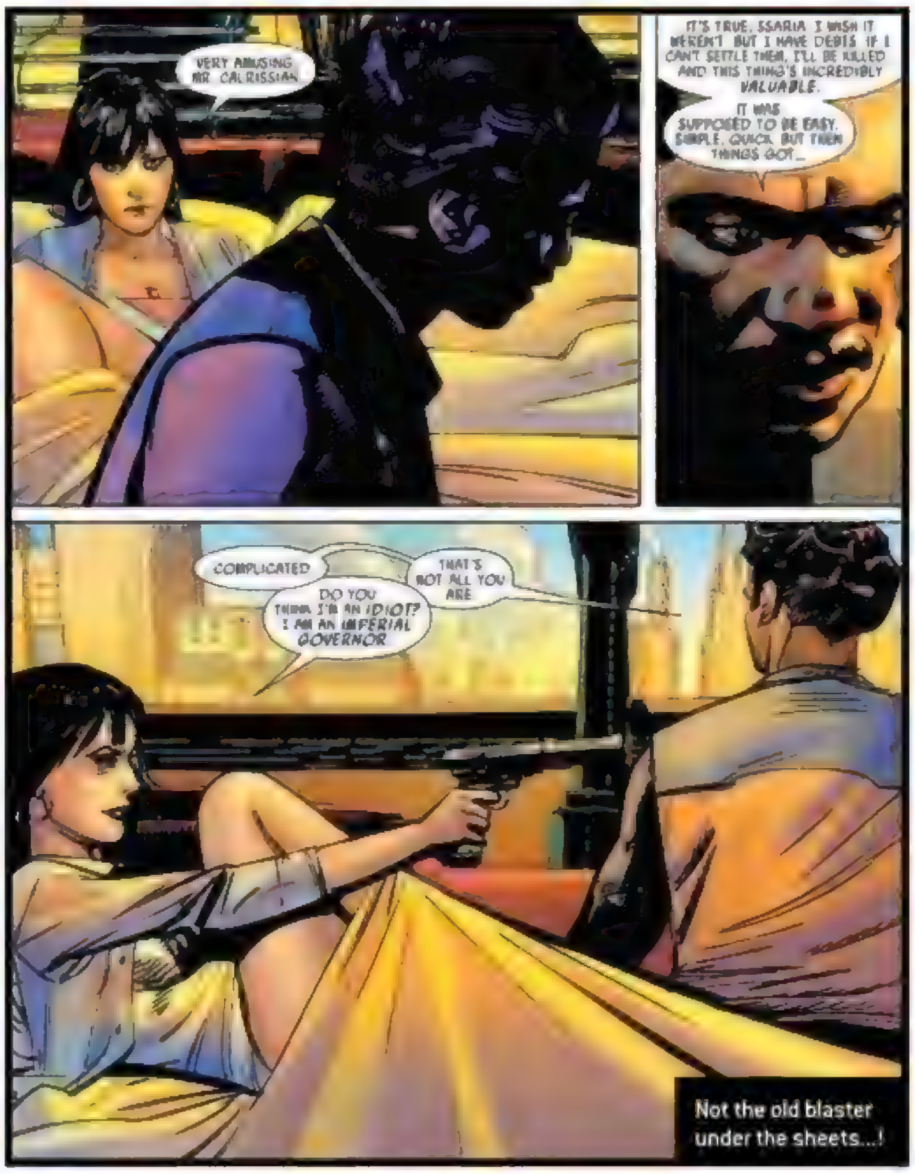
Soule's script does a good job of gradually revealing things. It's still a comparatively low-stakes story – there are no planets at risk from Imperial mega-weapons here – but #4 has fun with the notion of Sith artefacts being prized collectables and that the Jedi have already begun sliding into myth. The fact that the old Expanded Universe is gone and the new books and comics are now setting the rules adds some real weight. Sure, we know these characters aren't going to die, but what secrets of the Sith might we discover in the coming issues?

> "THE OLD EXPANDED UNIVERSE IS GONE. WHAT SECRETS MIGHT WE DISCOVER?"

## Suitably stylish

The dialogue feels authentic. And how fun – and tragic – that Lobot gets so much to say here. It's clear early on that this is the story that will leave him virtually mute.

The hero here, however, is Alex Maleev. His scratchy, shadowy art and Paul Mount's psychedelic colour palette are quite a contrast to the more straightforward and cinematic approach taken on the main *Star Wars* book. They perfectly suit the murkier areas of the galaxy that this book is exploring, and it's gratifying that Marvel isn't imposing a single house style for its *Star Wars* range. **Will Salmon**


VERY AMUSING MR. CALRISSIAN
IT'S TRUE, SSARIA. I WISH IT WEREN'T. BUT I HAVE DEBTS. IF I CAN'T SETTLE THEM, I'LL BE KILLED AND THIS THING'S INCREDIBLY VALUABLE.
IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE EASY. SIMPLE, QUICK. BUT THEN THINGS GOT...
COMPLICATED
DO YOU THINK I'M AN IDIOT? I AM AN IMPERIAL GOVERNOR
THAT'S NOT ALL YOU ARE

Not the old blaster under the sheets...!

storemags

# Bombshells

**Reviewed:** Issues 1-5
**Writer:** Marguerite Bennett
**Artist:** Various
**Publisher:** DC
**Format:** Ongoing
★★★★☆

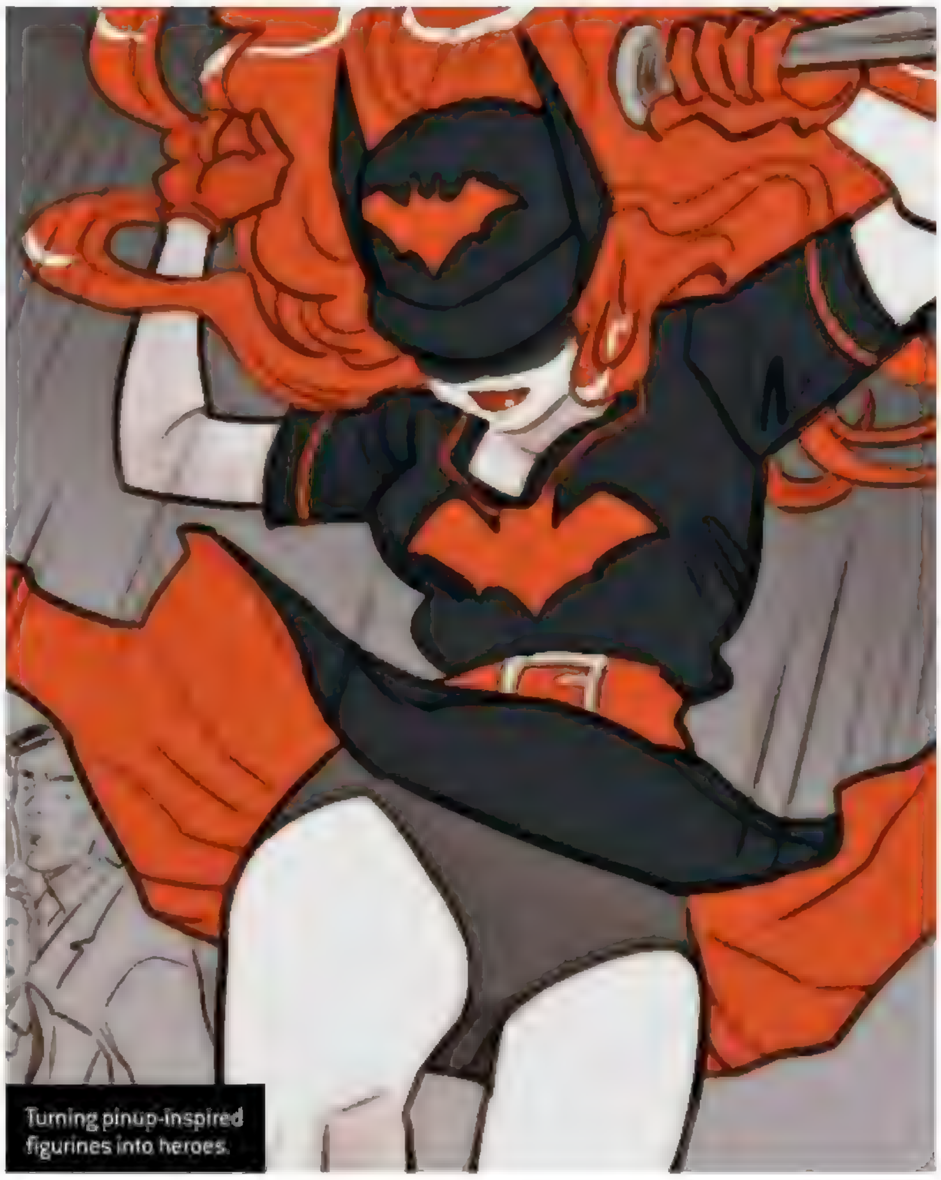
**Ant Lucia's DC Bombshells began life as collectable figurines, before becoming a merchandising sensation. Now they have their own digital-first comic, written by Marguerite Bennett with art by various artists, starting with Marguerite Sauvage.**

It's the 1940s and the world is at war. With the men away fighting, women are stepping up to the vigilante plate. This allows Bennett to cleverly rework the origins of Batwoman – now a baseball-playing socialite – and Supergirl and Stargirl, Soviet fighter pilot sisters (who look confusingly similar).

The wartime setting also allows Bennett to return Wonder Woman to her classic origin, with Steve Trevor crash-landing on Paradise Island and Diana heading off to fight the Nazis.

The reimaginings of classic characters are excellent: Supergirl has more attitude and strength here than in the mainstream DC continuity, while Wonder Woman is far more believable than in her current self-titled book.

Sauvage's art on the first three digital issues perfectly captures the tone, but subsequent artists' work looks a little too modern to fit in with the Bombshells aesthetic. Bennett, though, has found her niche: *Bombshells* lets her be witty and cheeky while crafting a cast of female characters who remain true to their iconic traits. **Abigail Chandler**



Turning pinup-inspired figurines into heroes.

# Curveball

**Writer:** Jeremy Sorese
**Artist:** Jeremy Sorese
**Publisher:** NoBrow
**Format:** Graphic novel
★★½☆☆

***Curveball* is a fat book (no less than 420 pages). It's a beautiful book. But it's a baffling book.**

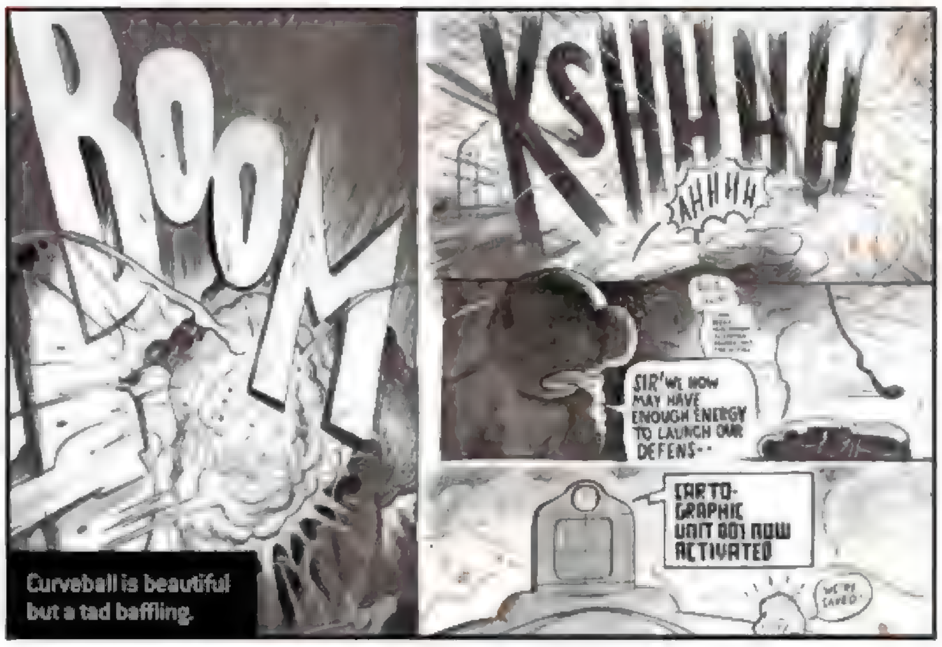
The story is set in a society that was once totally dependent on robots but is now – thanks to energy shortages – being forced to adapt to life mostly off the grid.

Ambling through this science-fiction setting is Avery, a waiter who remains romantically stuck on Christophe, a naval officer who is away at war – and has never showed any intention of committing to a relationship. Ultimately, it's more a case of Avery self-indulgently mooning after something he secretly knows never was. When asked about Christophe's obtuseness, he confesses: "I'm pretty guilty of enjoying not having my answer."

Jeremy Sorese has written and drawn this intriguingly futuristic graphic novel. His world-building is admirable, particularly the digression into how the military has been transitioning into old-fangled analogue technology for code-breaking and navigation ("But what if you can't find a pen, then what?!" moans one refusenik). But none of this seems to inform the main narrative. It just sits there alongside the human story. It makes for a rather disconnected reading experience.

This isn't helped by Sorese's cartooning. There's no denying that his work is beautiful and detailed – it has the smooth kind of roughness of an animatic – but his story-telling is often confusing and it can be difficult to get the geography of any scene or grasp characters' progression through it. In addition, he loves his dialogue. Protagonists are continually relaying anecdotes or verbalising their thoughts at length. In this already visually busy world, it just adds more clutter – a blur of chatter.

If anything, *Curveball* feels like a source book for something that could have great promise, if only it could just find its focus. **Graham Kibble-White**

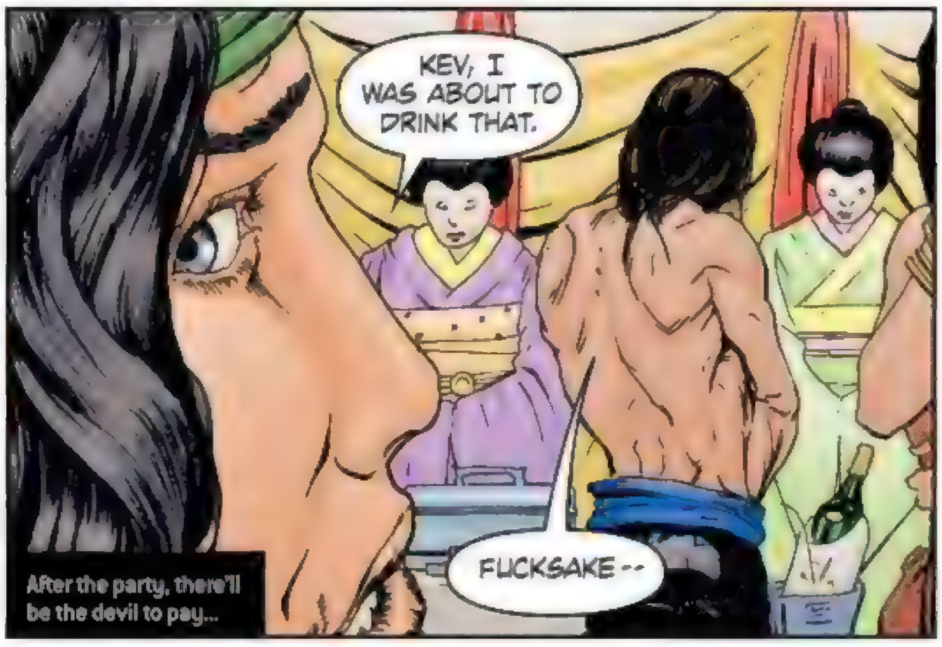


BOOM
KSHHHH
AHHHH
SIR, WE NOW MAY HAVE ENOUGH ENERGY TO LAUNCH OUR DEFENS--
CARTOGRAPHIC UNIT 001 NOW ACTIVATED
WE'RE SAVED!

Curveball is beautiful but a tad baffling.

# This Damned Band

**Reviewed:** Issues 1-2
**Writer:** Paul Cornell
**Artist:** Tony Parker
**Publisher:** Dark Horse
**Format:** 6-part series
★★★★☆


KEV, I WAS ABOUT TO DRINK THAT.
FUCKSAKE --

After the party, there'll be the devil to pay...

**The occult and rock 'n' roll have long gone hand in hand. But while some bands were sincere in their beliefs, others were purely in it for the glamour.** Paul Cornell's script expertly probes that disconnect between image and reality in this new limited series.

We're on the road with a camera crew who are following Motherfather on an enormous world tour. It rapidly becomes clear that Motherfather's devil worshipping image is a sham. Unfortunately, that comes back to haunt them when Old Nick himself really does turn up after one of their shows...

What starts as a gleeful look at the clashing worlds of superstardom – excess sex and drugs jammed up alongside the mundanity of constant travel and infinite cups of tea – becomes a hallucinatory bad trip. It's a showcase for Tony Parker's art, which conveys the rockumentary style while also occasionally bursting into hallucinogenic surreality. There's excellent attention to detail here – note the way that founder member Clive is always obscured in the opening panels, reflecting the way that he's increasingly sidelined in the group – while Lovern Kindzierski colours it all with the explosive palette of a psychedelic poster.

While the first two issues play down the supernatural elements, it's big on atmosphere and there's a strong a sense of looming disaster. There's also some nuanced characterisation: while Alex is a preening bellend, there's an edge of terror to his behaviour, thanks to his shady background, while guitarist Kev and partner Alice are struggling to maintain their relationship on the road.

Indeed, the women that the band take for granted are at the heart of this story and may yet turn out to be the only thing that can save Motherfather. A very funny comic, but also one that you suspect is going to turn nasty quickly. **Will Salmon**

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# Power Cubed

**Reviewed:** Issue 1
**Writer:** Aaron Lopresti
**Artist:** Aaron Lopresti
**Publisher:** Dark Horse
**Format:** Ongoing
★★☆☆☆

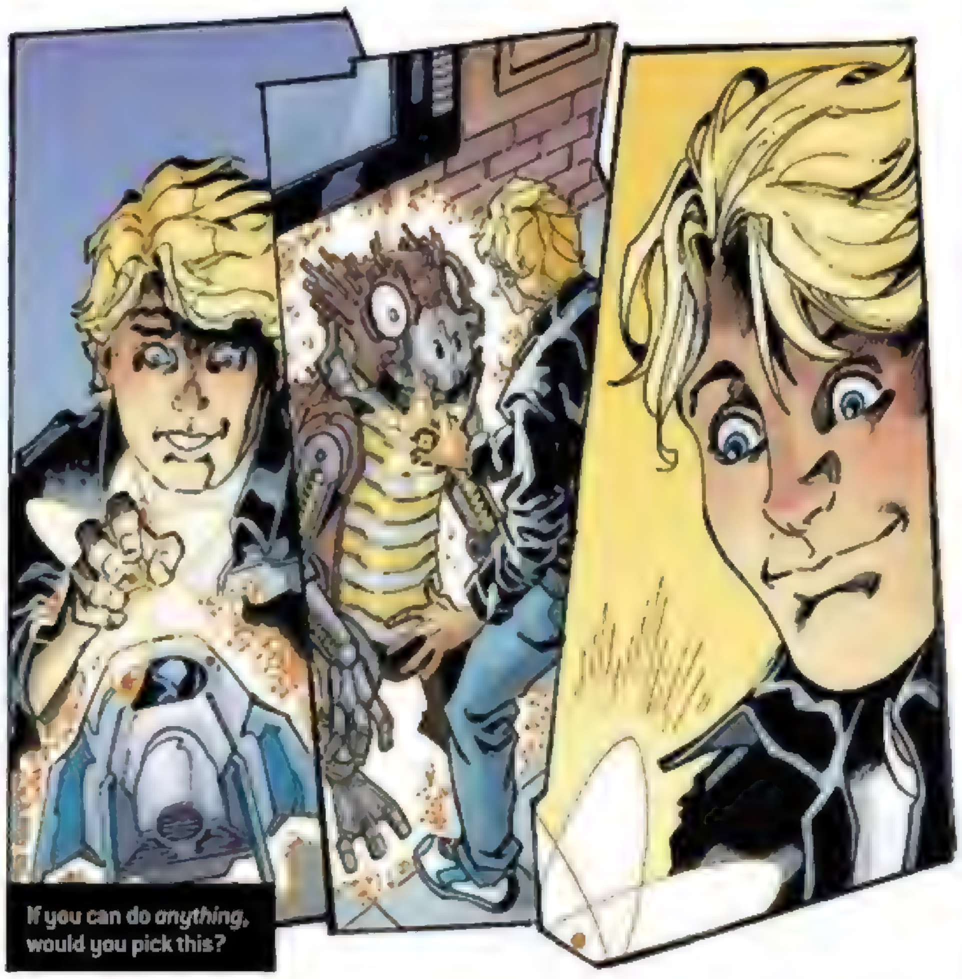
***Wonder Woman* and *Justice League International* artist Aaron Lopresti both writes and draws this new series.**

This retro-styled first issue feels like the setup to an '80s family movie. Kenny, a teenage boy, finds himself in possession of an alien cube that allows him to turn matter into anything he wants – so long as it's the same size (basic conservation of mass, right?). Oh, and a Nazi scientist is after the cube, because what else has a Nazi scientist got going for him these days?

*Power Cubed* is such an '80s throwback (Kenny even sports a leather jacket while his girlfriend has a side-ponytail) that the modern elements of the comic feel jarring. Comical references to the internet and online henchmen fall flat, and the out-loud narrations of the characters feel very dated.

Lopresti is a great artist and handles Kenny's wild imagination and the monstrous look of evil Dr Cruel well. He also visually nails the emotions during a painfully stilted conversation between a father and son who have grown apart since the death of Kenny's mother.

His writing skills, however, are not as well-honed. The dialogue is wooden and Kenny never feels like a modern 18-year-old. The book might have worked better had Lopresti fully embraced his inspiration and set *Power Cubed* in the '80s. **Abigail Chandler**



If you can do *anything*, would you pick this?

# JLA

**Reviewed:** Issues 1-3
**Writer:** Bryan Hitch
**Artist:** Bryan Hitch
**Publisher:** DC
**Format:** Ongoing
★★★★☆

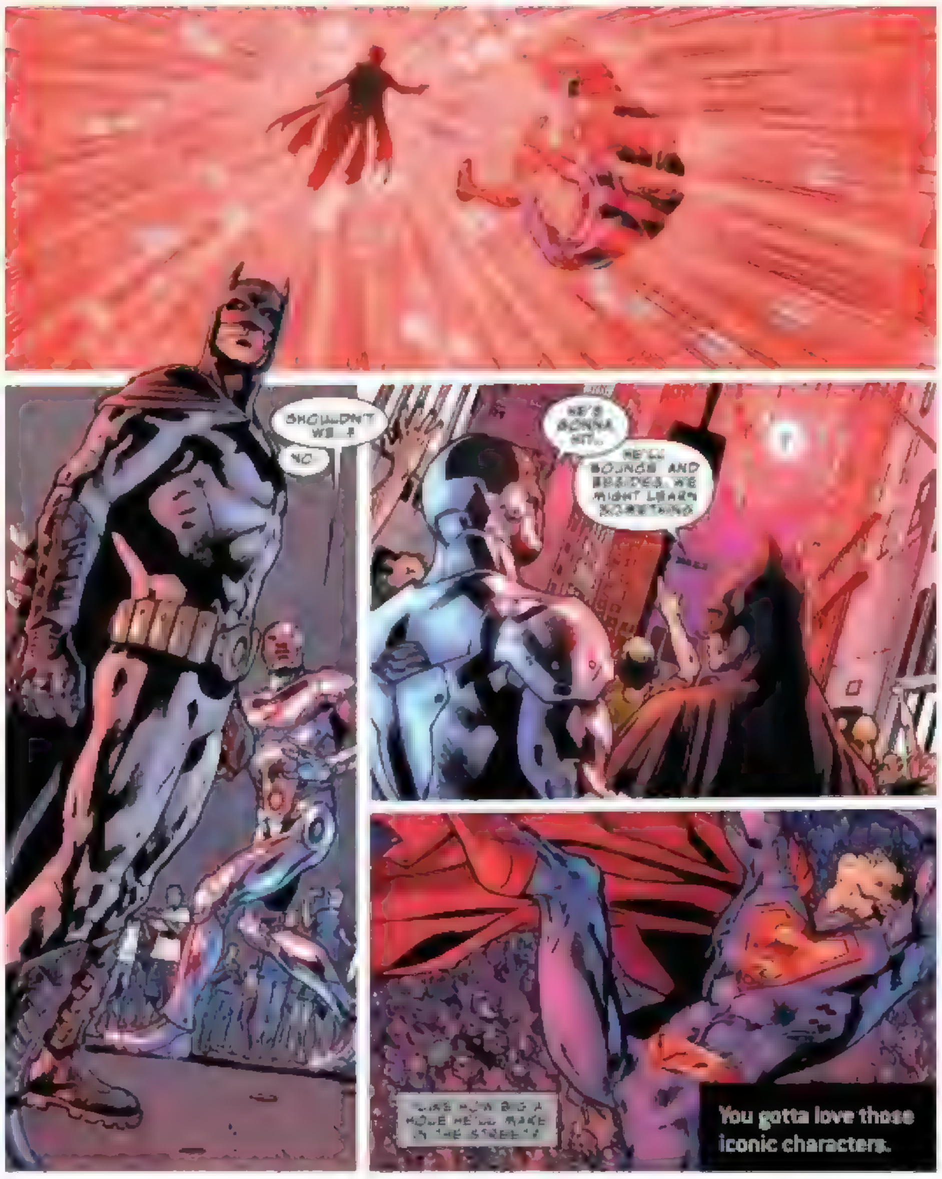
**Superstar artist Bryan Hitch is back on *JLA: Justice League Of America.*** Originally on the book in the 2000s solely as an artist, Hitch has been taking on double-duties for this reboot. If the first three issues are to be believed, he'll continue to prove month on month that his epic imagination isn't limited to drawing intensely detailed characters and scraps.

Don't get us wrong, Hitch's signature widescreen vistas, as seen in Marvel's *The Ultimates*, are present, but the plot is just as awe-inspiring. Mystery-filled and with shock revelations from the off, *JLA* is a hook-filled read.

The high-concept – the God Of Krypton comes to Earth – could be a Grant Morrison premise, and this certainly echoes Morrison's run on the super-team. Batman knows everything about everything, Superman somehow manages to feel even more like a benevolent deity when faced with his own God, and as for the rest of the gang... well, you'll see.

As you'd expect, the book is full of striking images, including a disturbing moment with a stack of dead Supermen. Supes is a key character for Hitch – it's no coincidence that he started reading comics when the first Christopher Reeve movie came out. It's clearly informed his work.

Most people will be drawn in by the promise of typically huge fights on a large enough scale to feel like they're bleeding off the page, but it's Hitch's story that'll keep them coming back. And, hell, #1's Cyborg entrance scene alone is worth the price of the full run. **Sam Ashurst**


SHOULDN'T WE...?
NO.
HE'S GONNA HIT...
HE'LL BOUNCE AND BESIDES, WE MIGHT LEARN SOMETHING.
LIKE HOW BIG A HOLE HE'LL MAKE IN THE STREET.

You gotta love those iconic characters.

---

# Virgil

**Writer:** Steve Orlando
**Artist:** JD Faith
**Publisher:** Image
**Format:** Graphic novel
★★★★☆

**There's vengeance on the streets of Jamaica in this gritty original graphic novel.** With its vibrant panels of yellow and purple and its explosive momentum, *Virgil* is a linear but satisfying revenge story set in modern Kingston.

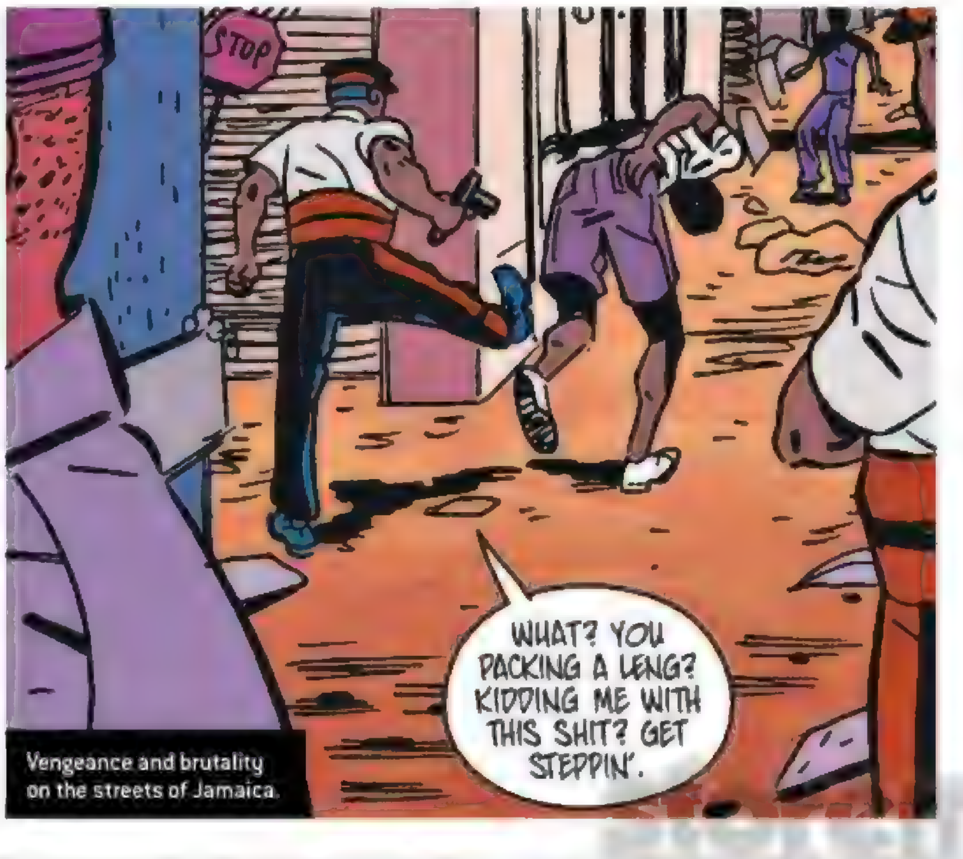
Virgil is a police officer, part of a macho culture that shakes down petty criminals and celebrates in the local brothel. But Virgil is also gay and in love with his boyfriend Ervan. Prejudices against homosexuality still run very deep in Jamaica – same-sex acts can score you 10 years in the clink. One evening Virgil's home is stormed, his friends murdered, his partner kidnapped and his face leaked to the papers in shame. So, in the best pulp tradition, Virgil goes on the rampage, gunning down crooks and cops alike until he finds out where Ervan is being held.

The book was funded on Kickstarter (216 backers pledged over $17,000 earlier this year) and the author's stated intention is to create a work of "queersploitation", a gay take on the muscular blaxploitation tales of the 1970s.

Behind the gunfire and fury there are moments of genuine tenderness and convincing glimpses of a relationship that's been forced to take place behind closed shutters.

You'll quickly get used to the Jamaican slang but you don't quite get a sense of characters beyond Virgil and Ervan – indeed many of his treacherous colleagues in the police force feel like faceless villains. And sometimes the wordless, static images don't do the destruction justice; the more mayhem-filled panels could stand to be bigger and bolder.

But this is a handsome page-turner, and its frantic, electric pages use a shoot-'em-up theme to highlight what remains a vitally important message. In tackling a modern problem in an aggressively old-fashioned way it demonstrates how well comics are capable of telling challenging stories while remaining gripping, action-packed entertainment. **Dave Bradley**


STOP
WHAT? YOU PACKING A LENG? KIDDING ME WITH THIS SHIT? GET STEPPIN'.

Vengeance and brutality on the streets of Jamaica.

stormags.com

# Elsie Harris Picture Palace

**Writer:** Jessica Martin
**Artist:** Jessica Martin
**Publisher:** Miwk
**Format:** Graphic novel
★★★★☆

**The 1930s are often thought of as the golden age of Hollywood.** Squeezed between two World Wars, they feel now like a brief, glamorous respite from the defining horrors of the 20th century, which is one of the things that make this original graphic novel, written and drawn by Jessica Martin, so appealing – and occasionally melancholy. It's not a sequel, but very much in a similar vein to her well-received short work from last year, *It Girl*.

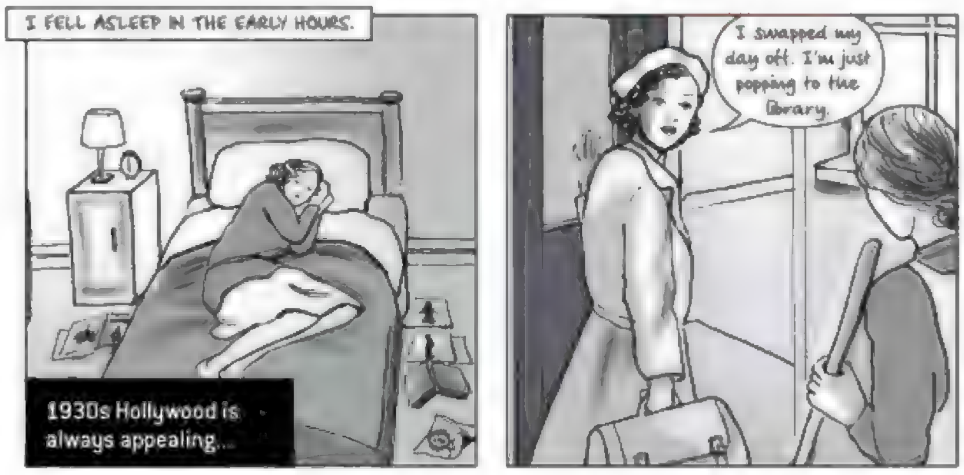
The hero of the book's title is Elsie, a young girl from a poor background, who is besotted with Hollywood. She wants to become an actress (the profession that Martin herself is best known for), but ends up as a star behind the scenes instead (no spoilers here, she's well on her way before the book's halfway mark). Immensely gifted, she finds fulfilment – but also her fair share of frustrations and disappointments from an industry that largely treats her with scepticism.

It's an unconventional premise for an unconventional book, but one that's immensely charming and refreshingly optimistic, even though it's clear from the off where the story is going. Elsie is always sympathetic and likeable, and Martin has a knack of finding the humanity in even the more antagonistic characters.

But our foreknowledge of real-world events also hangs over the book. We all know that there's a terrible darkness on the horizon for some of these characters, which lends the story weight.

Martin's art style is loose and fluid throughout, the monochrome the ideal match for the period and style. The shading, however, is not always quite up to snuff. For the most part it's fine, but every now and again a page will come along that looks a little scrappy and unfinished because of it.

Still, that's a small criticism. We want comics that are bold and different. *Elsie Harris Picture Palace* is all of those things and more. A poignant and charming book. **Will Salmon**


I FELL ASLEEP IN THE EARLY HOURS.
I swapped my day off. I'm just popping to the library.

1930s Hollywood is always appealing...

# Dead Vengeance

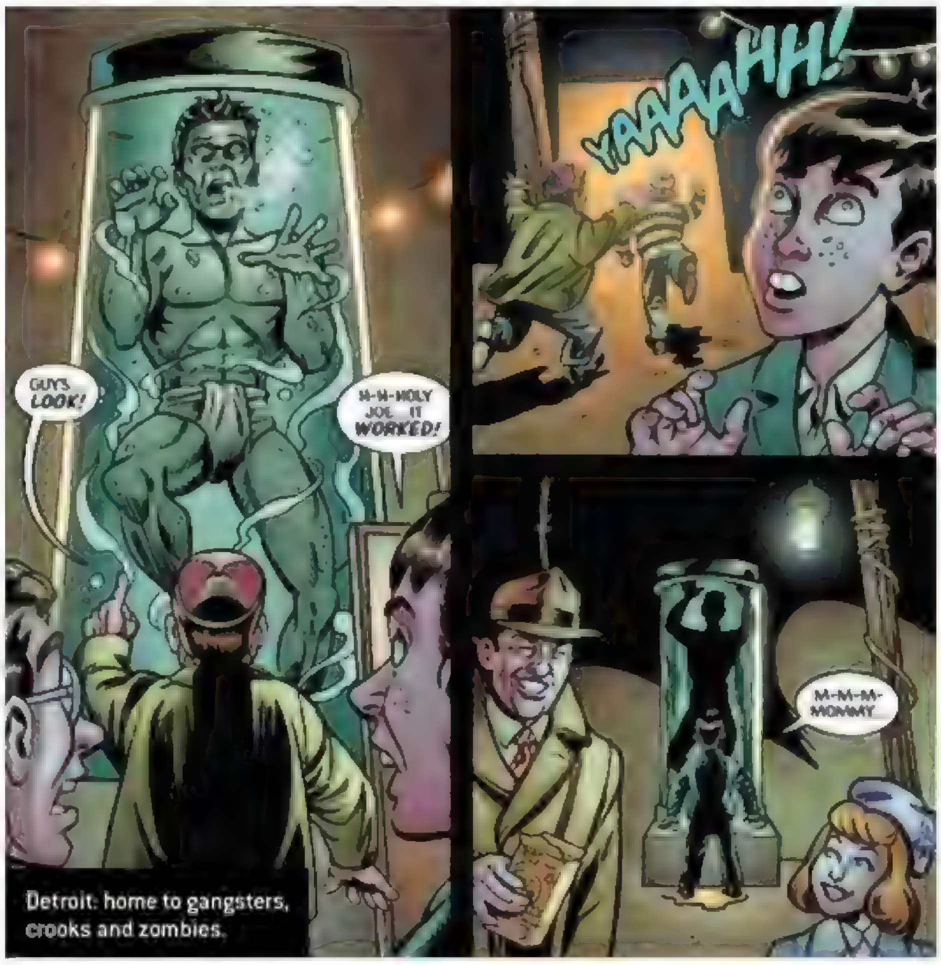
**Reviewed:** Issue 1
**Writer:** Bill Morrison
**Artist:** Bill Morrison
**Publisher:** Dark Horse
**Format:** 4-part series
★★☆☆☆

**This limited series from Disney artist and Bongo Comics cofounder Bill Morrison is a '40s pulp crime thriller with added zombies.** Johnny Dover is a preserved corpse in a circus side-show who returns to life and goes in search of his real identity – a crusading radio DJ who fell foul of gangsters in prohibition Detroit.

*Dead Vengeance* ticks off all the tropes of a pulp book: there are references to Mae West, the art is all strong lines and square jaws, and *everyone* wears a trilby. Morrison nails the voice of the era – you can practically hear the nasal twang in the '40s dialogue that's being thrown around. But there's nothing particularly new done with the pulp tropes here, and aside from the "awakened from the dead" bit, supernatural elements are undeveloped in #1.

The circus that the comic opens up in seems like a richer seam to mine than the standard gangster stuff that the majority of the issue concerns itself with. You expect zombies risen from the dead, but instead get half a comic of exposition about what Dover was up to before he ended up floating in formaldehyde.

Morrison loves the '40s and his art certainly evokes an era, but it doesn't stir any emotion. The reader never really relates to Dover, despite the many tragedies he faces, and the first issue is ultimately less involving than you'd hope. **Abigail Chandler**


GUYS LOOK!
H-H-HOLY JOE... IT WORKED!
YAAAAHH!
M-M-M-MOMMY

Detroit: home to gangsters, crooks and zombies.

storemags

# Sherlock Holmes

**Reviewed:** Issues 1-2

**Writer:** Scott & David Tipton

**Artist:** Ron Joseph

**Publisher:** IDW

**Format:** 5-part series

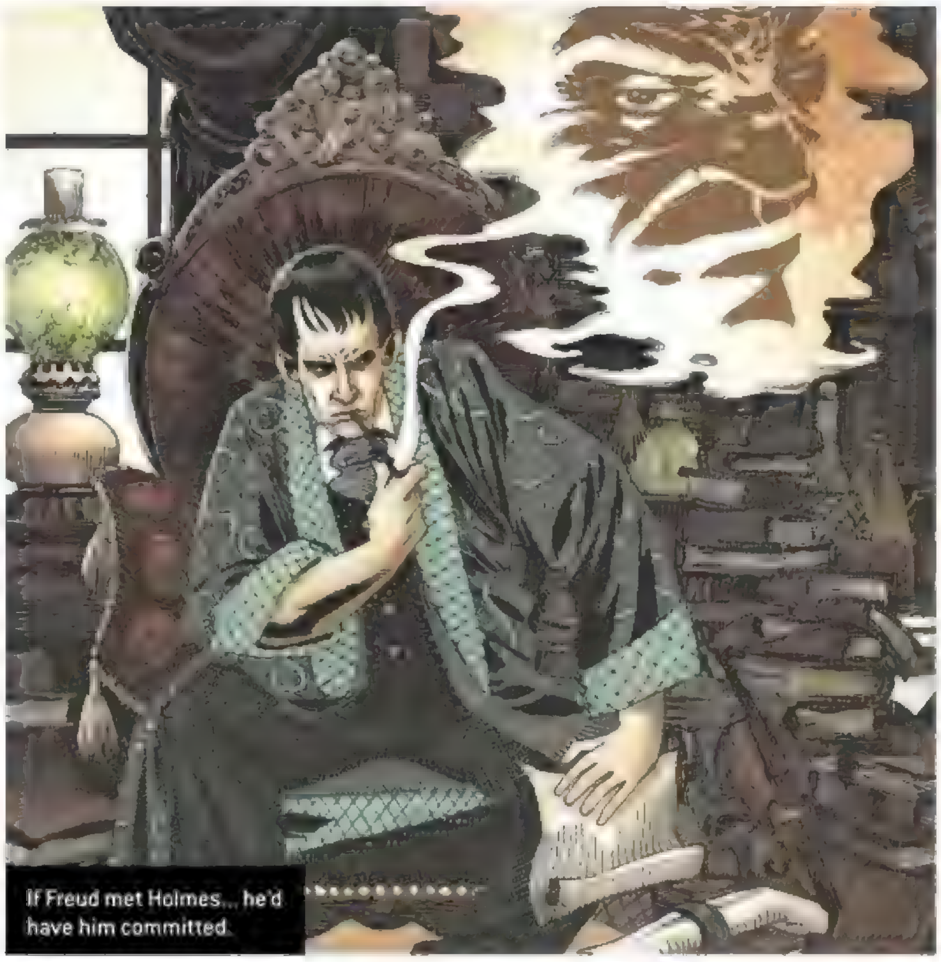
★★☆☆☆

**The BBC's *Sherlock* wasn't the first update of Arthur Conan Doyle's iconic character.** In 1974, novelist Nicholas Meyer wrote *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*, a brand new Holmes adventure that had the audacity to dismiss previous Doyle stories because they didn't fit the tale Meyer wanted to tell.

Here, IDW is being similarly audacious – dismissing the traditional comic-book format in an attempt to squeeze Meyer's novel into a limited series, with slim consideration for what makes comics fun. Issue 1, in particular, is slow-moving, and overwhelmingly reliant on long stretches of expository voice-over that make the book feel like prose. Great art could carry the weight of the heavy text, but even that feels workmanlike and occasionally unconnected to what's happening in the scene. One moment, where Watson gets suddenly angry and knocks papers off his desk, has little relation to the words on the page.

The story follows Holmes as he tracks arch-nemesis Moriarty to Vienna, a doubting Watson in tow. The pair team up with Sigmund Freud along the way.

We're not sure who *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* is for – it's not stylish enough for Sherlock fans, not canonical enough for Doyle geeks. Either way, we don't expect Benedict Cumberbatch will appear in an adaptation any time soon. **Sam Ashurst**



If Freud met Holmes... he'd have him committed.

# 2000 AD

**Reviewed:** Prog 1950

**Writer:** Various

**Artist:** Various

**Publisher:** Rebellion

**Format:** Weekly

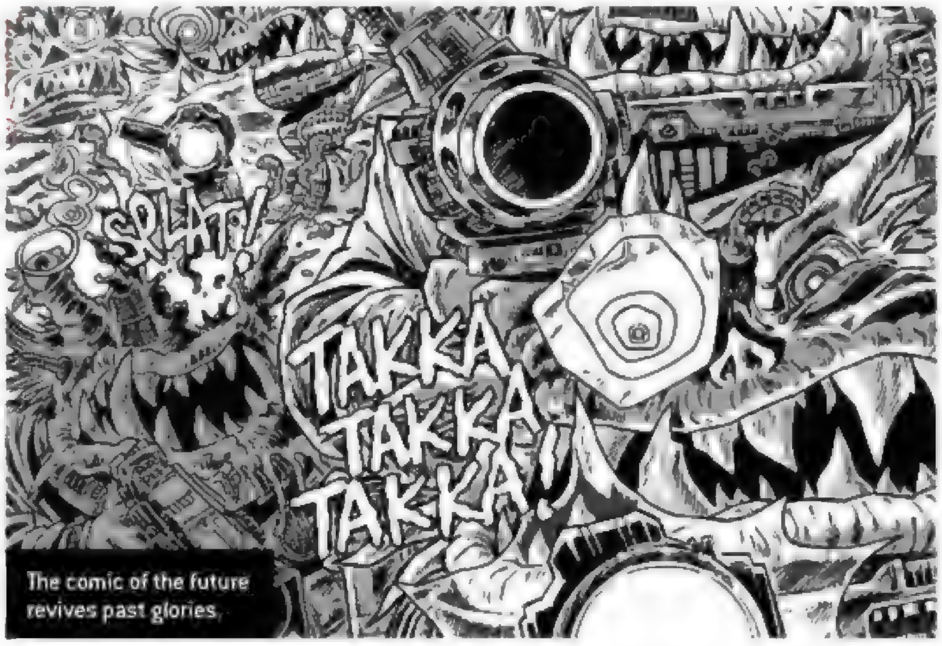
★★★★½

**One of the many nice things about *2000 AD* is that it regularly provides jumping-on-point issues.** This (astonishingly the 1,950th issue) is a particularly strong one, with four opening instalments that give a good taste of where these stories are going.

*Judge Dredd* has pride of place, just as he should. "Serial Serial" sees the return of mass-murderer PJ Maybe. The twist here is that you never actually see Maybe. He manipulates events from afar by tipping Dredd off about an unsolved case. It's good fun, and quite different to the epic disaster stories that have engulfed Mega City One of late.

*Defoe* is an alt-universe zombie story set in the 1600s. Pat Mills' dialogue is ornate, but the story so far can be summed up as: zombies attack. Happily, Leigh Gallagher's monochrome art is wonderfully macabre. The story opens with a rotting cadaver and only gets nastier from there.

*Brass Sun* is one of the more intriguing *2000 AD* series of recent years. A steampunk adventure (albeit with thankfully few dodgy imperialist overtones) it's very different from the violent strips that make up the rest of the issue. Inj Culbard's art has a cool, attractively European feel and it's engaging enough to encourage new readers to check out the back catalogue.


SPLAT!
TAKKA TAKKA TAKKA!

The comic of the future revives past glories.

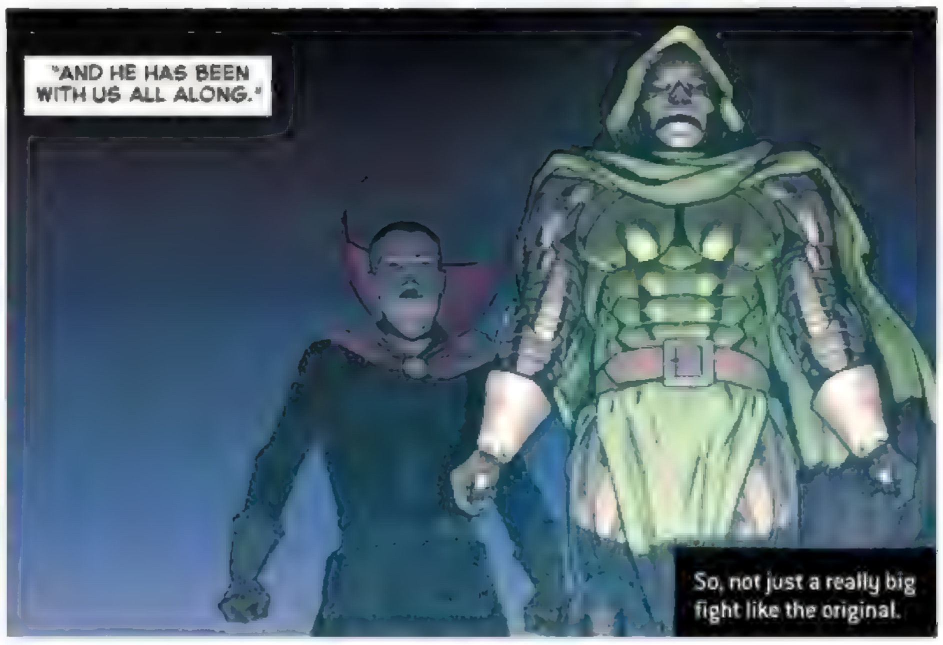
Finally, *Bad Company*. This future war saga reached a natural conclusion in the late '80s, and subsequent revivals haven't quite matched it at its best. "First Casualties" looks set to change that. Ten years after the Krool war, Danny Franks is a haunted shadow of his former self, drafted back into service in an attempt to find old comrade Kano. It's different enough from previous stories to not feel like a retread, while Rufus Dayglo and Jim McCarthy's art is a loving tribute to the late Brett Ewins and is every bit as insane as his original etchings. **Will Salmon**

# Secret Wars

**Reviewed:** Issues 1-3
**Writer:** Jonathan Hickman
**Artist:** Esad Ribic
**Publisher:** Marvel
**Format:** 9-part series
★★★★☆

SECRET WARS

**Dr Doom saved the Marvel Universe in the face of final destruction, creating a patchwork planet known as Battleworld.** A few survivors of the old universe have found their way to Battleworld, including some Avengers, Miles Morales' Spider-Man and Thanos. Whatever happens next lays the foundation of Marvel's future...


"AND HE HAS BEEN WITH US ALL ALONG."

So, not just a really big fight like the original.

While the spin-offs of *Secret Wars* have proven to be very casual-reader-friendly, the main event of Jonathan Hickman's epic is more of a conclusion to his recent *Avengers* and *New Avengers* runs than an event that's as easy to pick up as, say, *Civil War* or *Avengers Vs X-Men*. With that in mind, new readers may want to skip the main series and go straight to the relaunched line of All-New, All-Different books that are starting this October, which offer remixed Avengers and X-Men teams.

*Secret Wars*, by contrast, is very much the payoff of three years' worth of story. Marvel is straight up preaching to the converted here.

But while Hickman may not be writing for the uninitiated, there are mighty rewards here for those who have followed his outstanding mega-arc of collapsing universes and heroes forced to become villains. His *Avengers* books have offered a complex, huge-scale serial that has paid off at multiple intervals – like 2013's "Infinity" arc, where the Avengers became a symbol for resistance across the galaxy in the face of annihilation, or last year's "Time Runs Out" arc, which saw the Avengers divide and go to war.

*Secret Wars* is the endgame of that and, to some extent, Hickman's earlier runs on *The Ultimates* and *Fantastic Four*. None of the heroes saved the universe – Doom did. And this is the compelling story of what happens when the last surviving heroes try to get back what they've lost. **Samuel Roberts**

# Mutafukaz

**Reviewed:** Vol 1: Dark Meat City
**Writer:** Run
**Artist:** Run
**Publisher:** Titan
**Format:** Graphic novel
★★★½☆

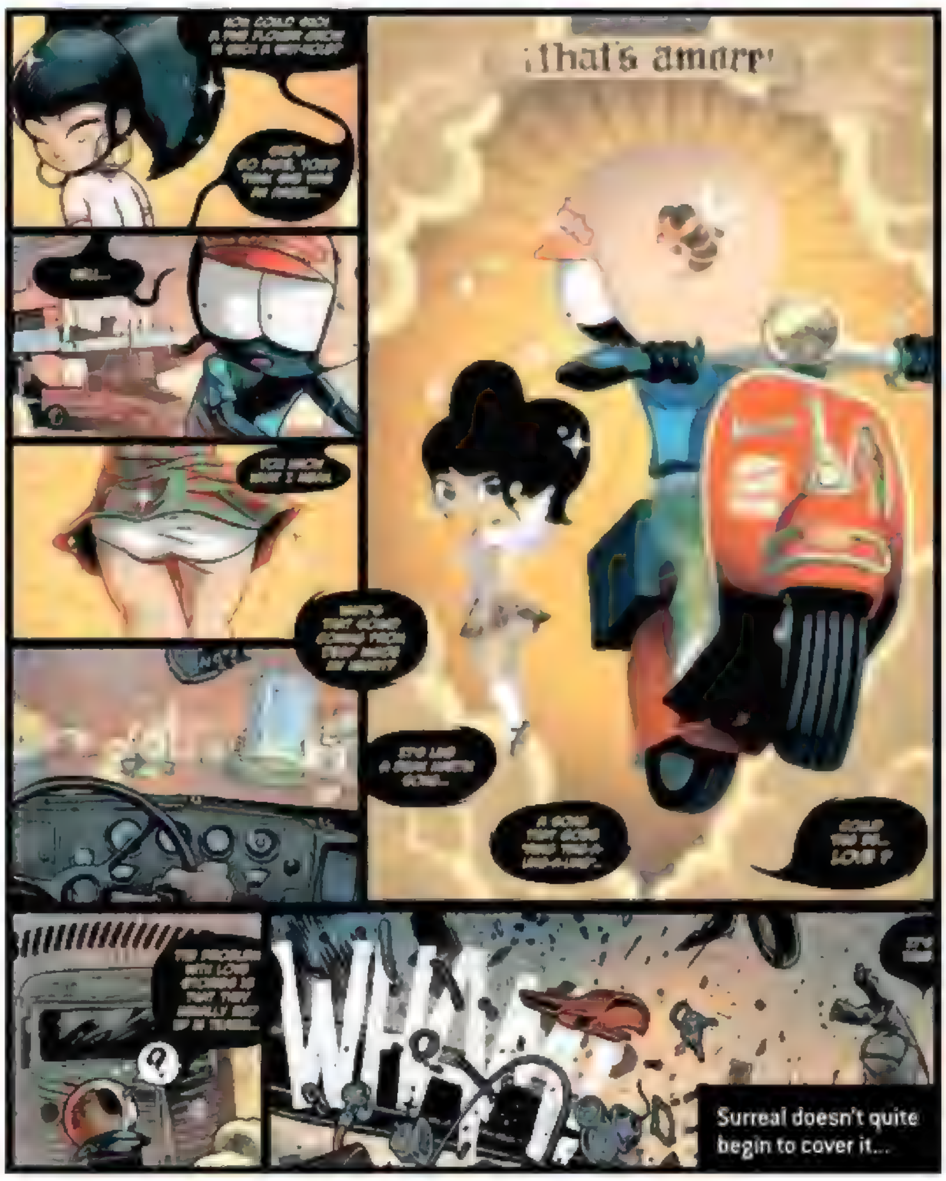
**It's little surprise to hear that *Mutafukaz* is in the process of being turned into an anime – reading it already feels like watching the craziest cartoon ever made.**

Hyperkinetic art combines with a plot that throws multiple genres and influences into a garbage pail and blends them with a samurai sword. It follows our cockroach-collecting hero, Angelino, as a potential brain tumour turns into possible superpowers following a messy pizza-delivery accident.

Graffiti-styled characters, Mexican-wrestling subplots and a pre-apocalyptic setting create a distinctive style that's unlike anything else on the shelves. *Mutafukaz* is a violent read, with punk-rock politics and sequences so surreal that it would feel like science-fiction even without the alien invasion subplot.

Angelino faces gargantuan gangbangers, mysterious men in black, and more in his quest to get to the bottom of what's causing his hallucinations, but don't expect resolutions – this is only the first volume and it ends on multiple cliffhangers.

Created by graphic artist Run, *Mutafukaz* is currently the most popular comic in France, with the first four volumes selling over 100,000 copies. Imagine *The Dark Knight Returns* directed by Tarantino after a head-injury and you're halfway to picturing this crazed book. **Sam Ashurst**



Surreal doesn't quite begin to cover it...

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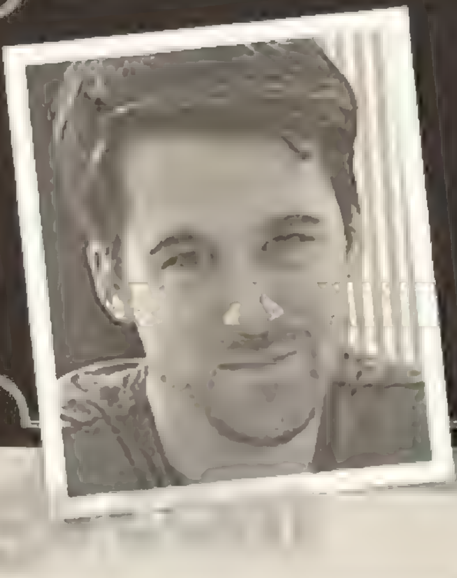
# CREATING INDEPENDENT COMICS

Want to create your own comics? In the first part of a new series, writer **Mike Garley** explains all you need to know to get started...

## PART ONE:

## STORY & CREATIVE TEAM



**Mike Garley** is a writer of comics, games, screenplays and other such cool stuff. Mike wrote beActive Media's Emmy nominated comic series ***Collider***, as well as ***Wallace and Gromit***, ***Adventure Time***, ***Eponymous***, ***The Kill Screen*** and ***The Samurai Slasher***.

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**There has never been a better time for creator-owned/indie comics (or just "comics" as I like to call them).** The popularity of the Marvel and DC Comics films has brought about a resurgence in the medium, and thanks to an abundance of new and established Cons, as well as the multiple options for online distribution, it's easier than ever to create a comic that can actually find an audience.

This feature is going to serve as a practical guide full of helpful tips to bring your comic to life, as well as detailing some of the (many) pitfalls you can avoid. However, it should not be considered an all-encompassing manual – you'll need to make your own route, and circumvent the problems you think will stop you from creating the type of story you want to tell.

## GETTING STARTED

I always give people the same advice whenever they ask me the best way to start in comics: anthologies. Anthologies give you a great place to hone your skills as a storyteller, as well as giving you some much-needed experience.

You'll also get the opportunity to go through the process with a skilled editor, who will be able to give you hands-on experience in creating comics. Editors can be expensive, so getting to work with one for free is an invaluable experience for any fledgling creator.

If that isn't incentive enough, working on an anthology should help you to get your work into print (without the usual financial risks of creating your own comics), as well as receiving a creator credit and getting your name known. There's little better than a foot in the door!

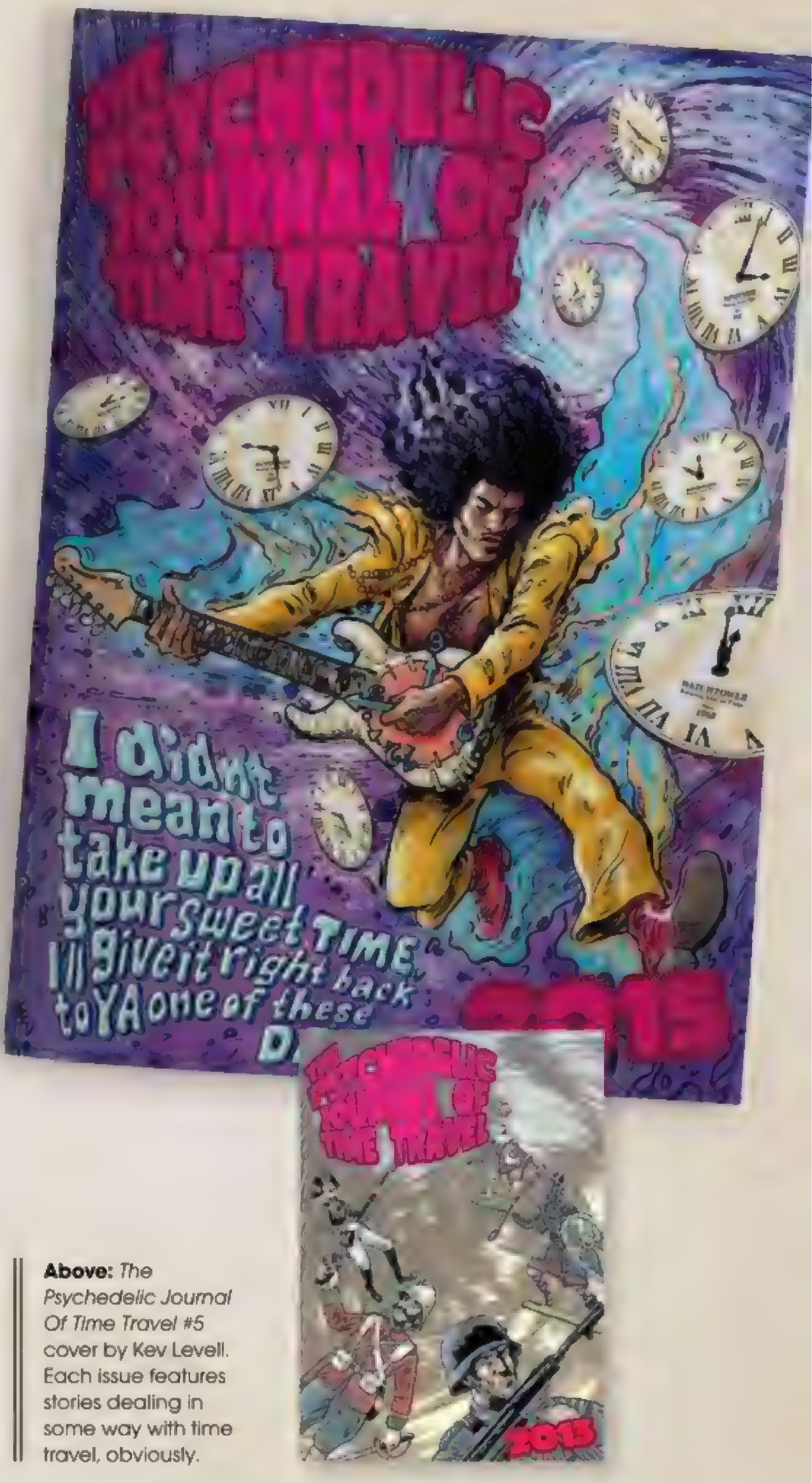
You can find anthologies that are looking for collaborators by either searching online or going to your nearest Comic Con. Ninety-nine percent of the people you find behind tables are lovely and will be happy to point you in the right direction. We don't like to talk about the other one percent...

## THE COST OF CREATING COMICS

If you're set on creating your own comics (which you should be because it's awesome) then you'll need to understand this inconvenient truth: comics are hard (really hard), expensive to create, and extremely time-consuming.

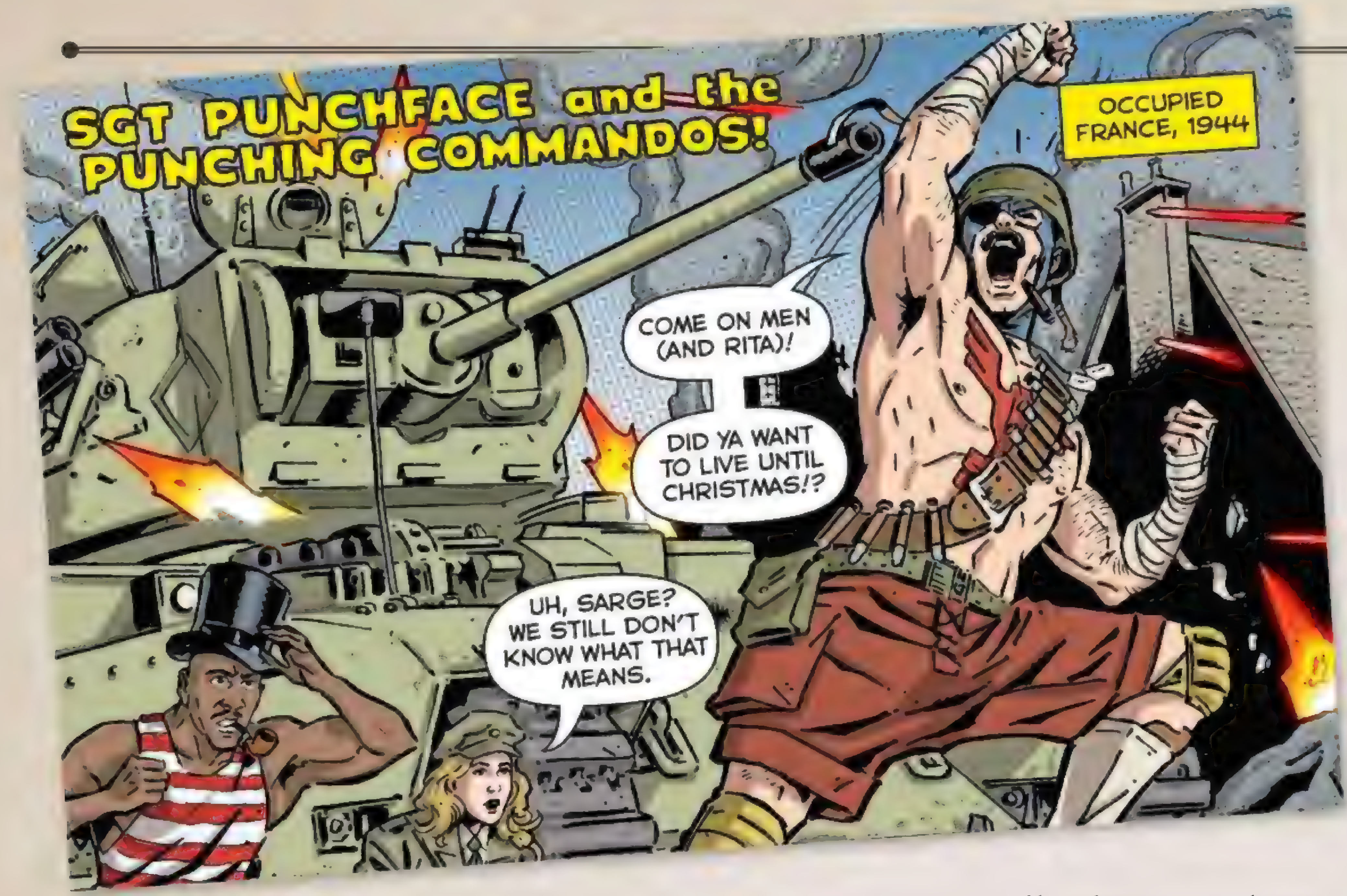
For the majority of creators their work is a labour of love, and while it is possible to make a living out of comics, if you go into it expecting to make a fortune then you'll be seriously disappointed.

Professional creators will charge from £25 to £200 (sometimes more) to produce one comic page, which means that for a 20-page comic you're paying between £500 and £4,000. And that's before taking into consideration factors like printing and selling costs. ☛


The Psychedelic Journal of Time Travel
I didn't mean to take up all your sweet time I'll give it right back to ya one of these D
2015
The Psychedelic Journal of Time Travel
2015

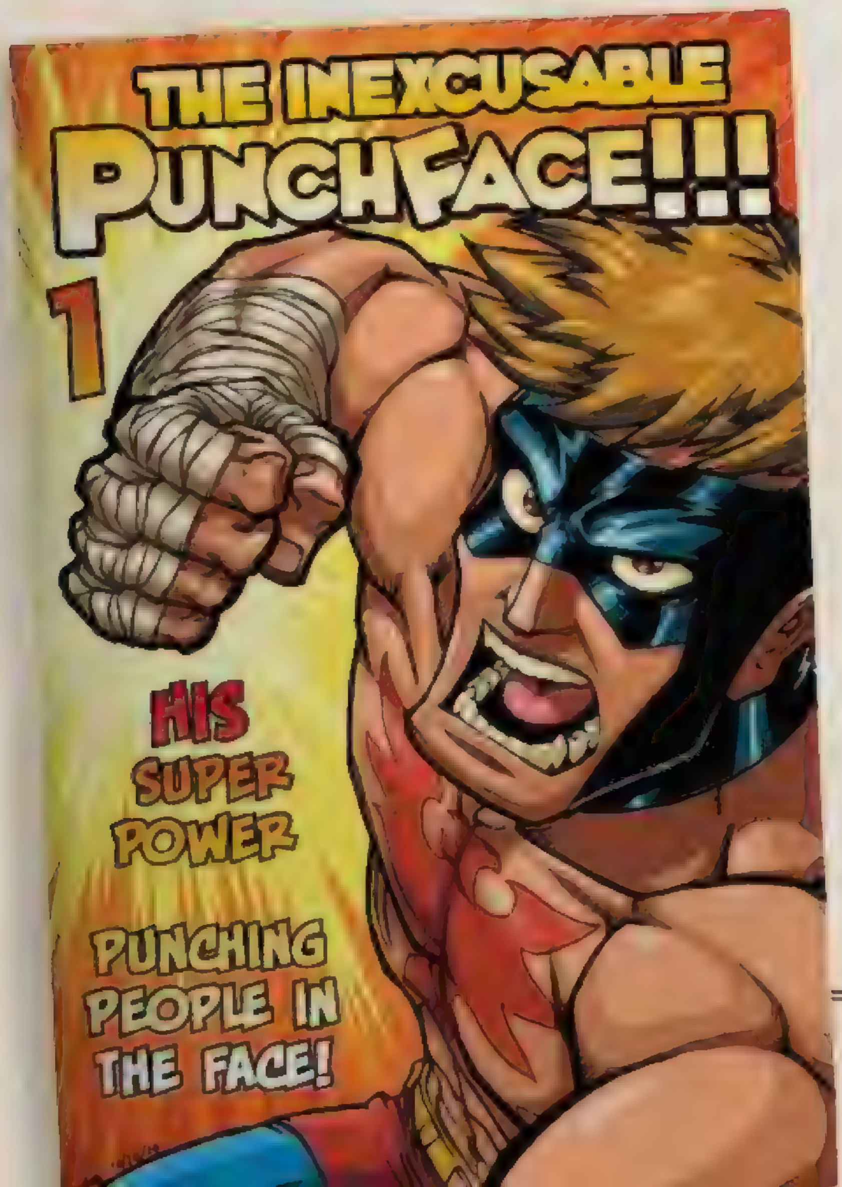
**Above:** *The Psychedelic Journal Of Time Travel #5* cover by Kev Levell. Each issue features stories dealing in some way with time travel, obviously.

> "We try to give a full, constructive review to every creator we get – it's time-consuming but if it means giving a first-time creator vital advice it's entirely worth it." – **Owen Watts (Co-editor of *The Psychedelic Journal Of Time Travel*)**


SGT PUNCHFACE and the PUNCHING COMMANDOS!
OCCUPIED FRANCE, 1944
COME ON MEN (AND RITA)!
DID YA WANT TO LIVE UNTIL CHRISTMAS!?
UH, SARGE? WE STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.

**Above:** Everything you need to know about Ned Hartley's *Punchface!!!* in a single panel.

**Below:** Cover art by Zak Simmons-Hurn.


THE INEXCUSABLE PUNCHFACE!!!
1
HIS SUPER POWER
PUNCHING PEOPLE IN THE FACE!

It's possible to make savings here and there, but more often than not these cost-saving shortcuts will be there for all to see on the page, which could discourage people from taking the risk on your comic.

The other factor that people greatly underestimate is the amount of time comics take to create. As a rough estimate you can expect a page of comic art to take between two to seven days, and this sliding scale is normally parallel to the £25 to £200 per page mentioned above. And then there's still no guarantee that you'll be able to stick to your schedule with pesky things like work and life getting in the way, not to mention that some pages just take longer to crack.

With both of these issues, many problems can be avoided if you factor in potential setbacks. Most importantly, make sure you establish an honest and open working relationship with your creative team from the beginning. And be realistic in your ambitions. As Ned Hartley (writer of *How to be a Superhero*, *Ghost Club* and *Punchface!!!*) cautions: "You're not going to get rich and you'll just end up with a house full of boxes of unsold comics. And no house because you had to sell that to make the comics."

## CROWD-FUNDING

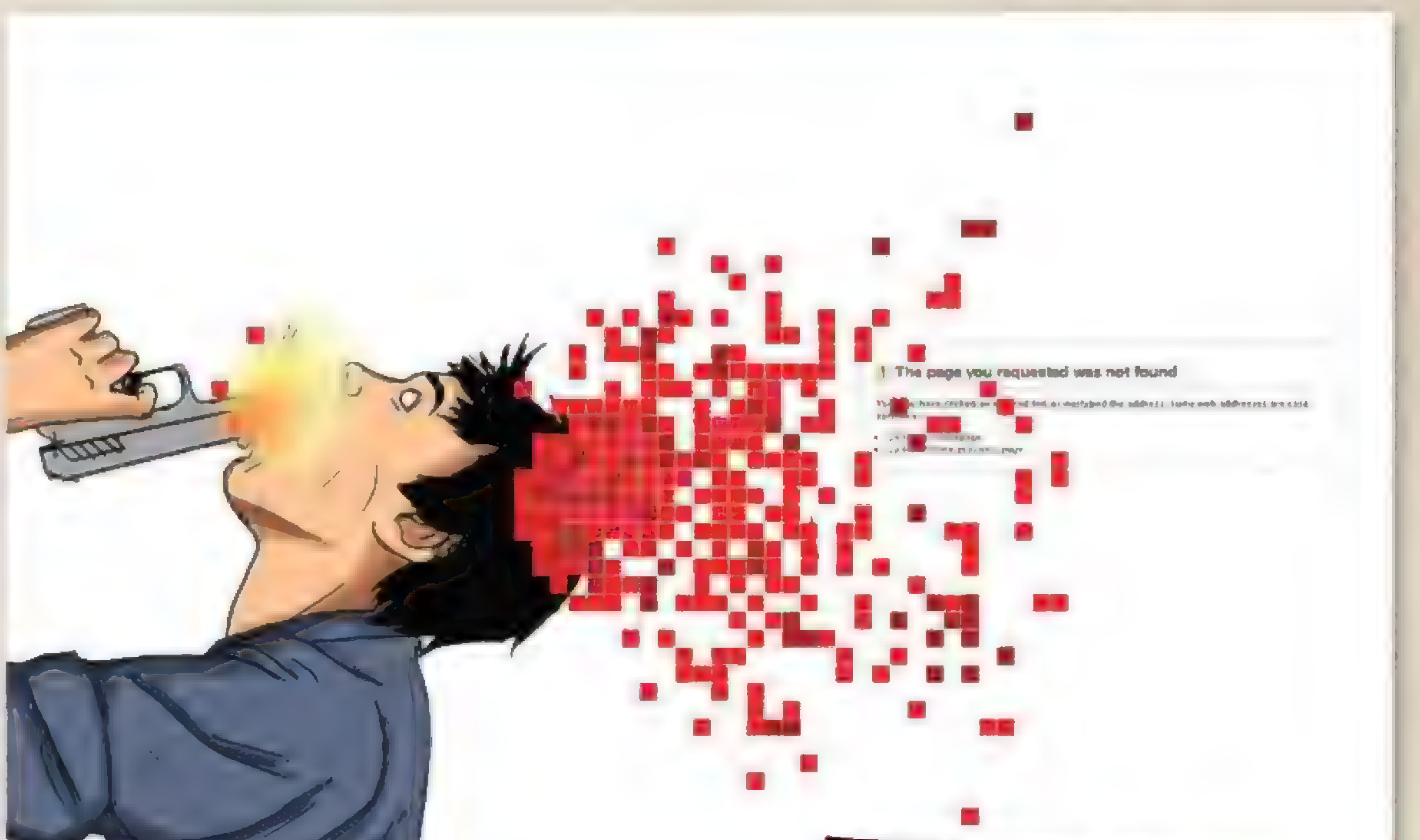
Crowd-funding platforms like Kickstarter and Indiegogo may seem appealing but unless you've already got an established fanbase or your project is finished (or you have a substantial amount of work completed), the amount of money you can actually make will be extremely limited. And with the size of the industry (it's proper small – but in a good way) you could seriously damage your reputation by running a campaign that either misleads backers or takes an inordinate amount of time to deliver. I'll go into more details about crowdfunding in a later issue.

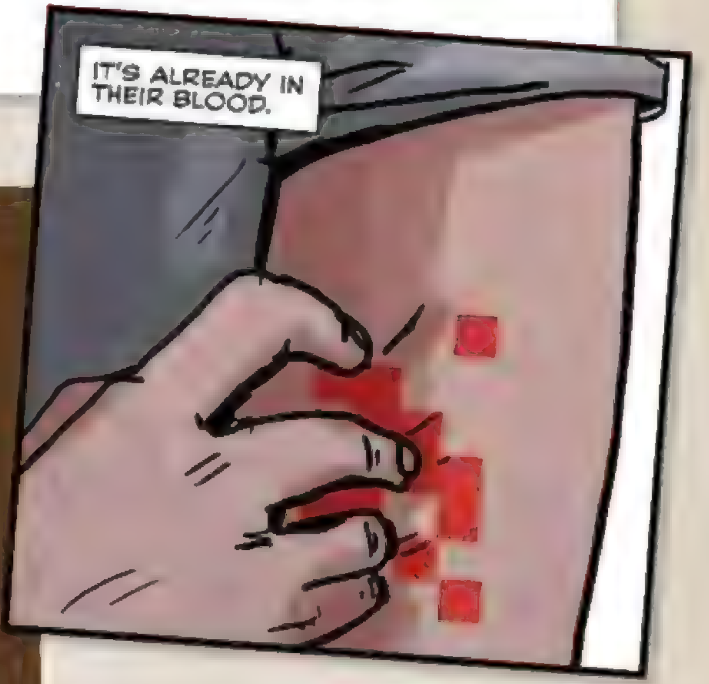
## TELLING YOUR STORY

With those harsh realities about creating comics out of the way, we can now start to focus on the fun stuff: the story.

The most important – yet often hurried – step to making comics is ensuring you've got a strong enough story to tell, and a strong enough way in which to tell it. The success or failure of your comic is dictated by the strength of your story and how you and your creative team can bring it to life.

Me and Josh Sherwell (the artist and co-creator of *The Kill Screen*) created a two-page story to test the visuality of our story. We found this really helped us to develop our idea, as well as giving us the opportunity to test our working relationship – this was our first project together.


The page you requested was not found


IT'S ALREADY IN THEIR BLOOD.

**Above:** Panels from *The Kill Screen* written by Mike Garley, art by Josh Sherwell, and lettering by Mike Stock. (Yes, Stock lettering!)

> What would happen if computer errors infected mankind? This image works in unison with the basic premise of *The Kill Screen* to help convey the concept of the comic to potential buyers. It's extremely early on in the comic, which really helps when people read the opening, and the size (double-page splash) means that people see it even when they're only flicking through the issue.

One of the easiest mistakes you can make is not taking the time to develop what makes your story unique, and how you can convey that to someone without them reading it first! Before people will invest their time or money in your comic, your story needs to grab their attention. This is especially important if you're working in a popular genre like superheroes or zombies, where you'll be competing with thousands of other similar titles. You not only need to have a story that is different from those, but you must also be able to easily convey to the reader what makes your story different. And that's a hell of a lot harder than it seems.

The importance of being able to communicate your idea succinctly will be evident when you pitch it to potential publishers or collaborators, and of course when you attempt to sell it to the public. It makes sense to work on defining your concept long before you get to that point, because by then there's a strong chance that you will have already invested a lot of time and money into your comic.

If you're selling your comic in person (at a Con, for example) then you could have as little as 30 seconds before the person you're talking to remembers that they've got no money, they've lost their friend/partner/child and need to find them immediately, or that they're just on their first pass of the Con and will be back later.

Your job is to make sure you can cover everything that you think makes your story great within that time, and in a way that excites and engages them – and then if they don't like it, you can cry yourself to sleep knowing that they at least made an informed decision.

But if it isn't tricky enough thinking about how you'll

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## TELL US ABOUT YOUR COMIC!

We love independent comics and want to feature more of them in *Comic Heroes*. If you have completed a comic and it's out there available to buy, or to read online, then let us know about it. Send the details to **stateofindependents@gmail.com** and we might feature you in a future issue.

describe your story with you there to sell it, there's more: your story must be understood and described succinctly in reviews and previews, as well as by people who've bought your comic and enjoyed it so much that they want to tell their friends about it. Possibly over Jägerbombs.

A tried and tested way to create and polish your idea is a simple one: talk to people (friends/family/pets/the postman) and see what makes sense, what excites them, what questions they ask. The more feedback you can get, the better.

After you've tied down what makes your story stand out, you can start to flesh it out. Do this by drafting a paragraph or two that goes into more plot details than your initial description – but this too is something that may be seen by readers, so avoid spoilers and be wary of hyperbole. Ensure you explain how big/long it is and where and how it will be published. You don't need to go into tiny detail but you want people to understand the tone of the story, which should give them an indication of whether it's something they'd like.

## UNDERSTAND YOUR COLLABORATORS

If you're considering creating your own comics, you probably already have a good idea of what everyone involved in comics does. But it's still important to appreciate what they bring to a project – or even more vitally, how not having people with the relevant skills can damage your project.

### The Writer

You can have a great story and an incredible creative team, but if the writing itself isn't solid then people will very quickly lose interest. You need an original and engaging script. Take your time and get as much feedback as possible, and not only from friends – you need critical eyes on your work too. If you can afford an experienced editor, or are lucky enough to be friends with one, then you'll find their expertise invaluable. Good editors make stories even gooder *(Editor's note: gooder isn't a word)* and help to protect you against any mistakes that may – and often will – sneak through.

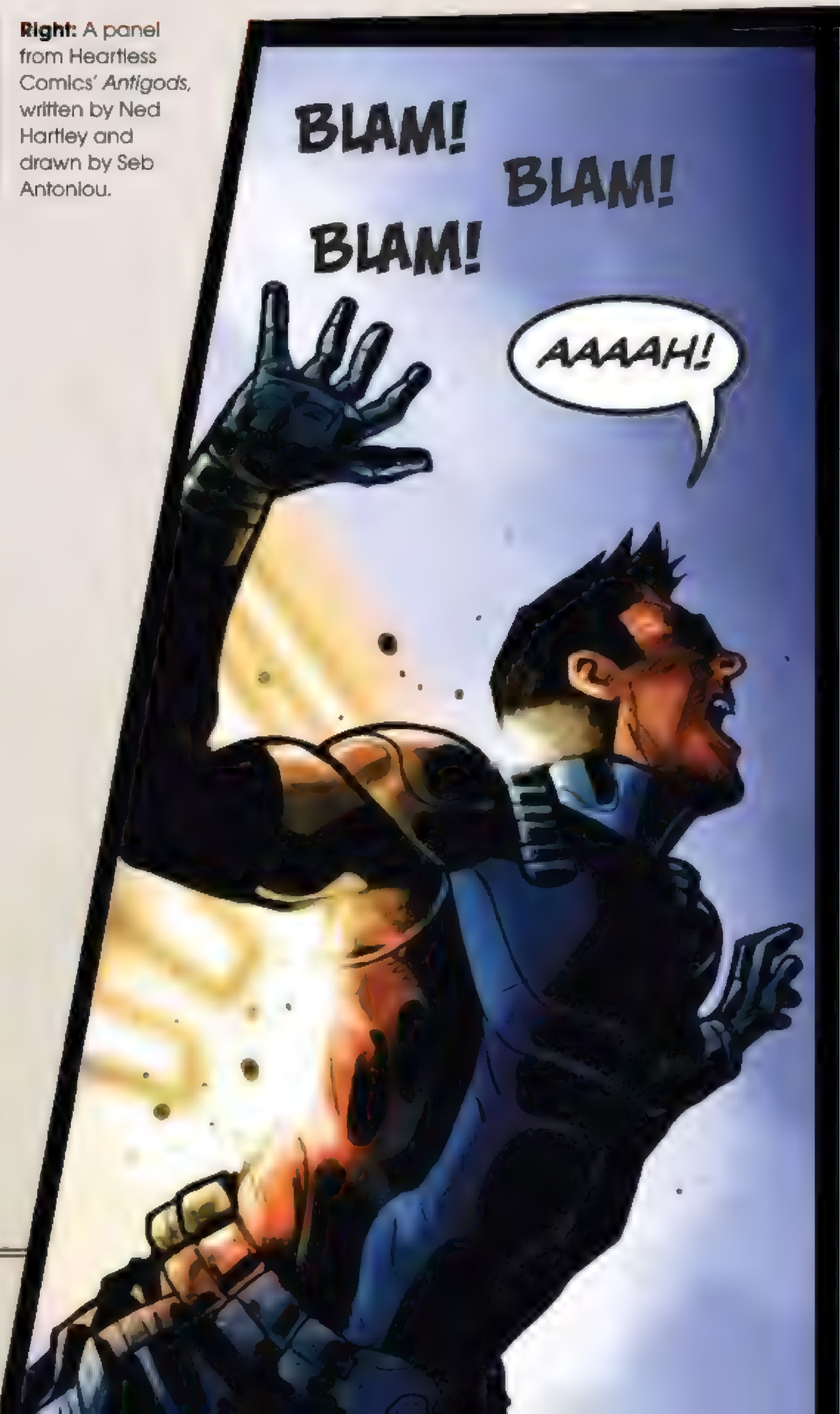
### The Penciller/Line work

I always say people will pick up a comic for the artwork and keep reading it for the story. The best artists are not just the ones who draw the prettiest pictures. They're the best storytellers. The better the artwork, the more likely it becomes that people will pick up your comic. With this in mind, be respectful of how long artwork can take and how much work goes into each page.

### The Inker

Inking evolved only because the cheap printing processes used for early comics demanded high-contrast black-and-white artwork, and after the time-consuming design, layout and pencilling stages ☛

**Right:** A panel from Heartless Comics' *Antigods*, written by Ned Hartley and drawn by Seb Antoniou.


BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!
AAAAH!

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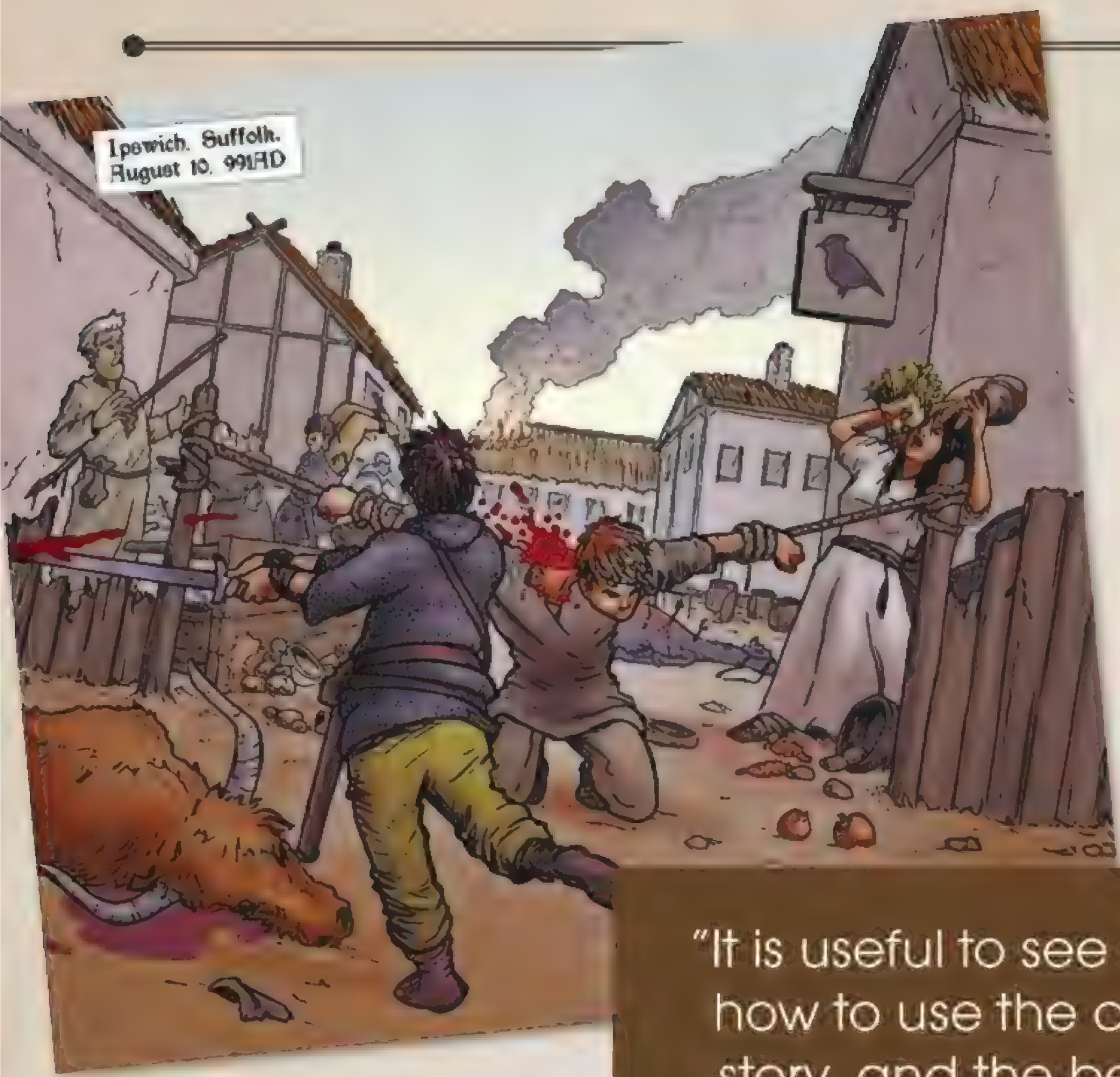
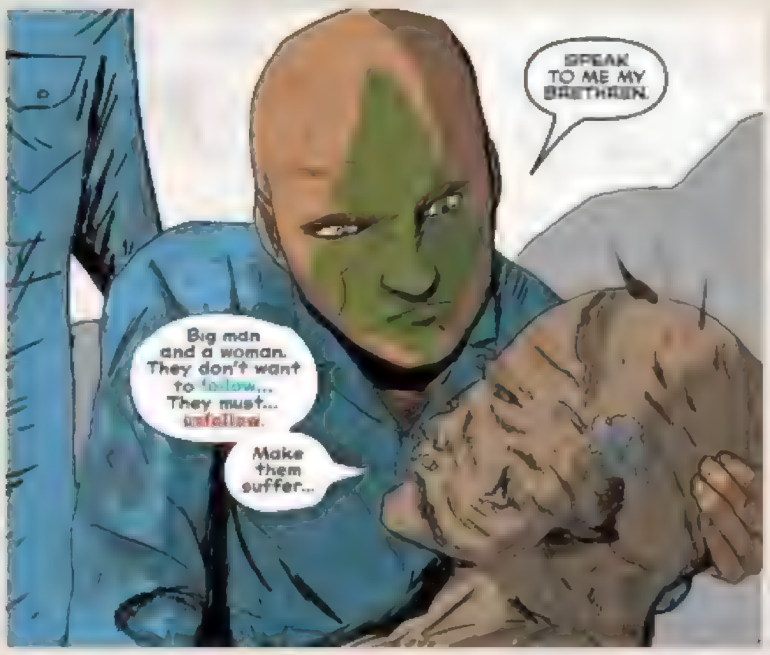



SPEAK TO ME MY BRETHREN.
Big man and a woman. They don't want to follow... They must... unfollow.
Make them suffer...

> "It is useful to see somebody understands how to use the comics medium to tell a story, and the best way to demonstrate that is through a created piece of work."
> – **Steve Tanner (Editor of Time Bomb Comics)**

there often wasn't time for the same artist to go over everything in India ink. Modern technologies make it possible to print from pencil art (or pretty much anything really) but good inkers are far more than tracers and bring a vast range of skills to the table. That said, independent creators just as often produce the finished art (pencils and inks) themselves.

### Flatting and colouring

In the same way, although some artists will colour their own work, some will require a colourist (if you're using colour at all). "Flatting" is just the term for laying down areas of flat colour, the usual initial stage of colouring on computer. This is often done by the colourist but sometimes by a separate specialist. The mark of the best colourists is that rather than just colouring comics, they are actually using colour to help tell the story. Don't underestimate how much damage a bad colourist can do, or how much a great colourist can add to a project.

### Letterers

Unfortunately not everyone will notice great lettering – its job is not just to be legible but to seamlessly lead the reader's eye around the page. Lettering is one of those jobs that people think they can do themselves, but everyone will notice bad lettering. It stands out. Bad lettering is the easiest way to make your comic look cheap! There are some great comic lettering fonts for doing it on computer, but choose carefully to match your style of artwork and avoid overused fonts (and never touch Comic Sans). Spelling mistakes and typos always make work look amateurish.

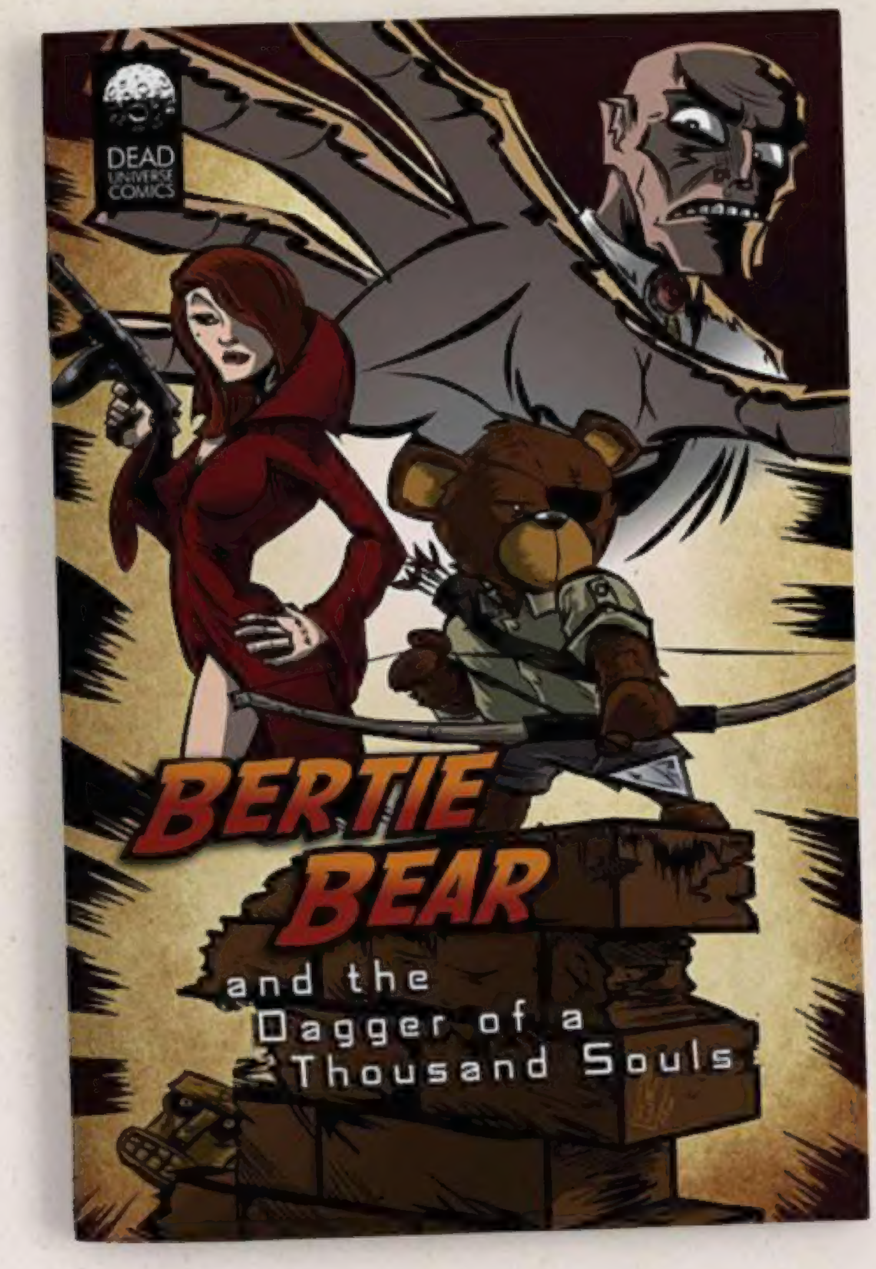
**Above left:** Time Bomb Comics' *Defiant* - written by Andy Winter, art by Daniel Bell, and colours by Aljosa Tomic.

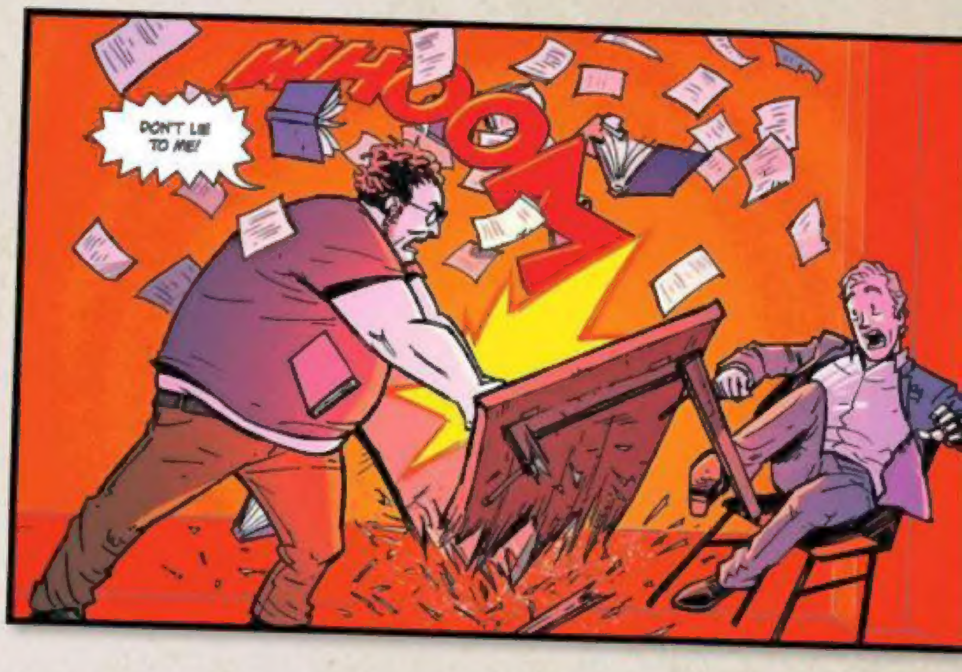
## APPROACHING COLLABROATORS

Now you've done all the basic building of the idea, you're ready to approach your collaborators. Unless you're talented in all these fields then you'll need to look to others to collaborate with.

The most popular ways to find collaborators are through message boards such as Digital Webbing (www.digitalwebbing.com) and Deviant Art (www.deviantart.com), to approach people in person at Cons, or to scour social media (Twitter can be great for this). Look for examples of past work – and if there isn't enough or there isn't something in the style that you like then don't be afraid to ask a potential collaborator for samples.

> "I think trust is the most important thing when working in a creative partnership. Whether it's creator-owned or work-for-hire, both writer and artist are storytellers, and if there's not that level of trust between them in their abilities as storytellers, it won't work." – **Andy W Clift (*Bertie Bear, Samurai Slasher* and *Dead Roots*)**





**Left:** The cover to Andy W Clift's *Bertie Bear*, the tender tale of a monster slayer trapped in the body of a teddy bear.

**Right:** Right: *How To Be A Superhero*. Art by Gavin Mitchell, words by Ned Hartley.

When approaching others, it's important to be honest and open. Let them know what your expectations are for the project, if and how much you can pay them, and what your deadlines are – and most importantly be willing to compromise and adapt.

Don't expect people to work for free. Most creators will want to be either financially or creatively rewarded. If all you're offering is "exposure" then you're going to struggle to find a reliable/experienced collaborator. You'll find that the vast majority of creators will actually find this insulting and unprofessional.

No matter how great a creator is, they might not be right for every project. Find out by talking to them. Encourage questions, and when you're both happy create a contract/agreement.

I know a lot of people find this step difficult but it's important and is there to protect you, clarify exactly what is expected of everyone involved, and confirm the all-important deadlines.

The best projects are the ones where all the creators are on the same page (metaphorically). For this reason, I'd suggest working together on a shorter project first (such as a prelude or a short story) to test how well you all gel as a team.

Comics take time. Be patient, and make sure you don't let your enthusiasm get the better of you.

I hope these first few steps help you not only solidify your story, but assemble a creative team to work on it too! Next time I'll cover the various formats you can use for a comic, plus crowdfunding. If you've got questions or want to suggest a topic for me to cover then you can tweet me at... **@mikegarley**

## CONTRACTS

### THINGS TO COVER

Deadlines

Ownership (if this is split then include the % breakdown)

Usage Rights

Payments (and payment schedules - traditionally 50% up-front and 50% after publication)

Detail what happens if things go wrong

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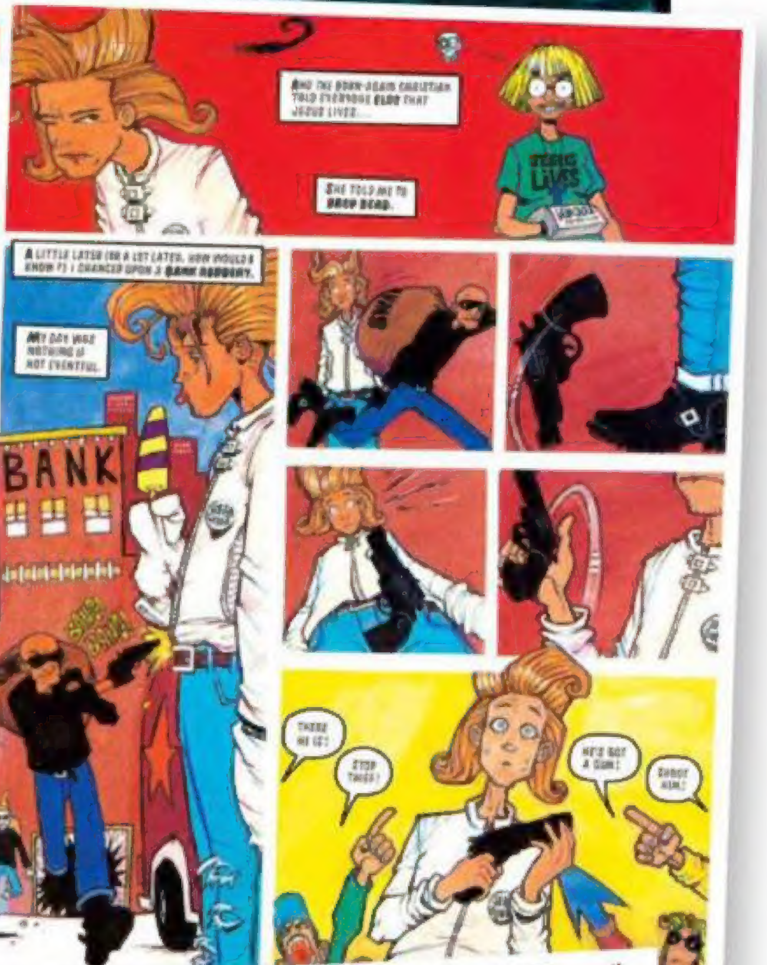
## MY LIFE IN COMICS

# DAVID BAILLIE


AND THE BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIAN TOLD EVERYONE ELSE THAT JESUS LIVES...
JESUS LIVES
SHE TOLD ME TO DROP DEAD.
A LITTLE LATER (OR A LOT LATER, HOW WOULD I KNOW?) I CHANCED UPON A BANK ROBBERY.
MY DAY WAS NOTHING IF NOT EVENTFUL.
BANK
THERE HE IS!
STOP THIEF!
HE'S GOT A GUN!
SHOOT HIM!

### THE FIRST COMIC I READ

A Marvel UK reprint – I think maybe *Spider-Man Comics Weekly*. The first one I remember buying with my own pocket money was actually a reprint of Stan and Jack's first Fantastic Four story. I read it a hundred times and eventually the newsprint disintegrated! Occasionally I take a look at it on eBay and try to convince myself that I can buy back my childhood.

### THE FIRST INFLUENCE ON MY WORK

Simon Furman, who wrote the *Transformers* comic when I was a kid. It was a licensed comic that would sell regardless of what was going on in it, but he created something great: epic storylines, exciting characters – and Death's Head.

### MY FIRST PROFESSIONAL COMICS WORK

It was a five-page *Future Shock* for *2000 AD* called "The Lie" (from Prog 1611). I remember nearly shaking as the comps envelope came through my letterbox and hit the floor, and I tore it open and... It wasn't as good as I'd remembered. I was still excited, but I thought I'd written a masterpiece and I most definitely had not. It's right what they say – the best way to learn is to see your mistakes in print.

### MY FAVOURITE COMIC OF ALL TIME

It's a tie between *Hewligans's Haircut* (Milligan and Hewlett, *2000 AD*) and *Pulpatoon Pilgrimage* (Joel Priddy, AdHouse). I read both obsessively after first discovering them and clawed my hair out trying to figure out how such perfect comics could ever be created by mortal hands. I now have no hair.

### THE BEST COMIC I'VE WORKED ON

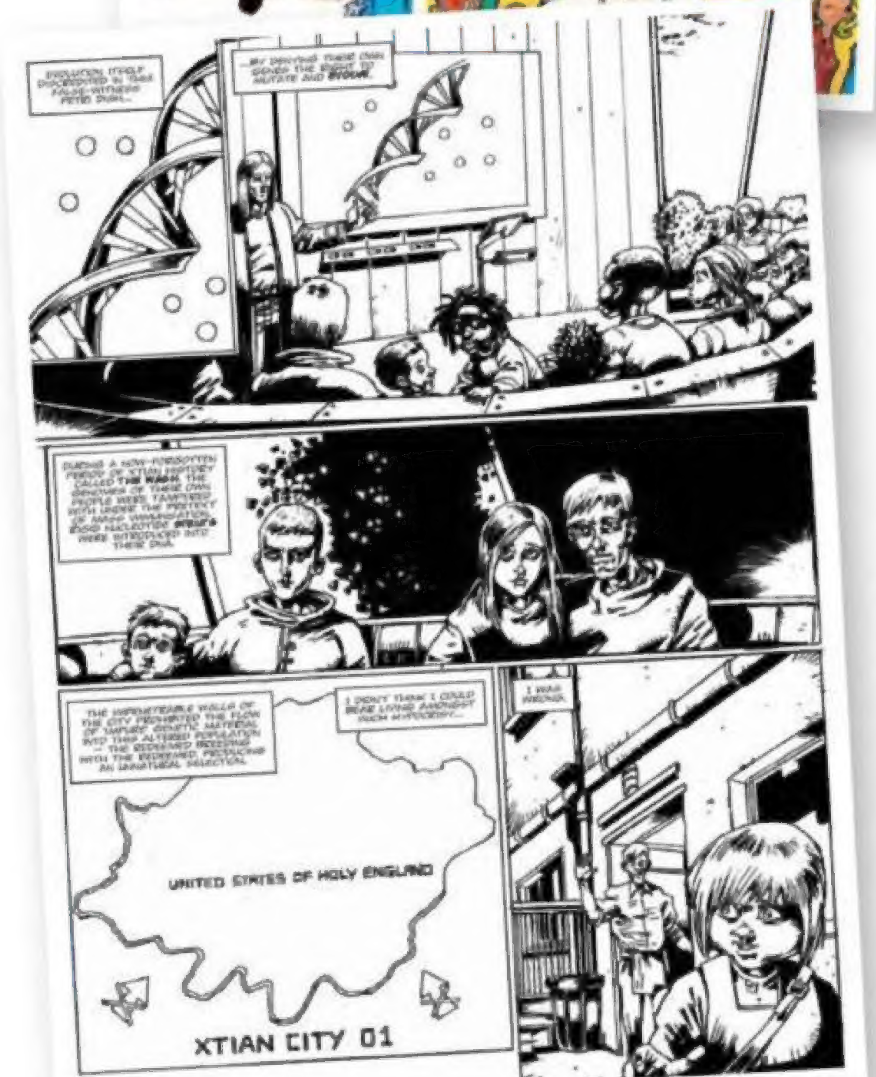
I'm not just saying this because it's what I'm pimping this month, but my new series – *Red Thorn* – is where my heart is. I pitched a sprawling Celtic fantasy epic to Vertigo and they welcomed it with open arms. I've been living with the characters for so long that I feel like I know them better than my own family. And Meghan Hetrick is a joy to work with.

### THE CHARACTER I'D MOST LIKE TO WRITE

Batman or Spider-Man. What can I say, I'm a geek!

### I'M CURRENTLY READING

*Saga* (obviously), *Injection*, *Arcadia*, *Southern Bastards*, Jason Aaron's *Thor*, *Batman*, *Omega Men*. I just finished re-reading *Scalped* on my tablet and it was so good I nearly wept. I'm also heartbroken that *The Unwritten* has finished as I worshipped that comic.


...BY DENYING THEIR OWN GENES THE RIGHT TO MUTATE AND EVOLVE.
THE IMPENETRABLE WALLS OF THE CITY PROHIBITED THE FLOW OF 'IMPURE' GENETIC MATERIAL INTO THIS ALTERED POPULATION — THE REDEEMED BREEDING WITH THE REDEEMED, PRODUCING AN UNNATURAL SELECTION.
I DIDN'T THINK I COULD BEAR LIVING AMONGST SUCH HYPOCRISY...
I WAS WRONG.
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